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AUGUST 2001

CHOICE

Independent information for smart consumers

Tests

VACUUM CLEANERS
SMALL FREEZERS
ELECTRIC FRYPANS
HIGHCHAIRS

Energy drinks

CAFFEINE IN A CAN

The best spread for your bread

Get rich quick?

INVESTMENT SEMINARS INVESTIGATED

Not perfect yet

Nowadays products tend to be a lot more reliable than 20 or 30 years ago, in CHOICE's earlier days. We don't find many lemons in our tests any more — products that won't do the job they're sold for — or many appliances that'll electrocute you or fall apart after a few uses.

But one category of products still consistently fails safety tests: baby products. We regularly find cots with safety problems, and in this issue seven of the 12 highchairs we tested failed a major safety test — they're unstable and can be easily tipped over (page 18).

As with most baby products, there's no mandatory standard manufacturers have to abide by. We still find it strange that some of the most vulnerable people in society are the least protected when it comes to product safety.

There are still plenty of other hazards for consumers too. Take food labelling and how it's regulated. Our analysis of 'energy' drinks (page 23) shows that the major active ingredient in most of them is caffeine. While there's nothing wrong with caffeine for most adults, kids can easily have too much — and a recent study has shown that lots of kids and teenagers buy these drinks.

Currently there's no regulation requiring manufacturers to show on the label the amount of caffeine in the drink or any warning that it isn't suitable for children. Some do carry a warning that they contain caffeine, but it's usually in such small print among a mass of design and colour that most people aren't going to notice it. While the food regulator (ANZFA) is developing a standard that would cover labelling of some energy drinks, it's a long way from solving the problem in the form CHOICE has seen.

And then there are the investment seminar promoters who'd like to convince you they can tell you how to get rich quick (page 8) — provided you shell out money to learn about or invest in the risky investment strategies they promote…

The problems may have changed for consumers, but we still need to be careful out there.

Jane Mackenzie, Editor

CHOICE

is published by the Australian Consumers' Association

YOUR LETTERS

We welcome the letters you send us — please always include a daytime telephone number so we can contact you quickly if we want to follow up your letter. We're sorry we can't personally answer every letter we receive, but we do use them in our research. Thanks for taking the time to keep in touch.

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REQUEST A TEST

If you've seen something you'd like us to test, email us at requestatest@choice.com.au or call us on (02) 9577 3399.

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We test and rate products and services. Our ratings are usually based on quality without regard to price, and are derived from lab tests, expert judgments and reader surveys. If a product is high in quality and relatively low in price, we deem it a **Best Buy**. A rating applies only to the brand and model tested, not to other models sold under the same brand name, unless so noted. Financial information in CHOICE is of a general nature, and is not intended to be advice on individual investments.

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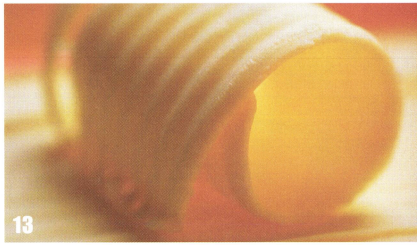
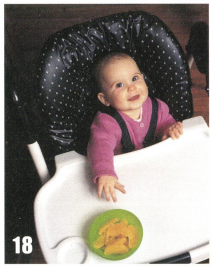


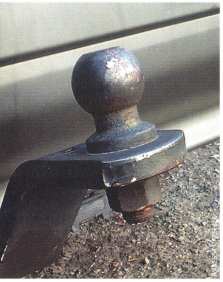


TOWING PROBLEMS

Are you planning to buy a heavy vehicle to tow a caravan, boat or horse float? When you're hitting the dealers' yards, don't just rely on the sales staff's expertise or the data in a sales brochure to find out all you need to know. For important technical data, always check the owner's manual.

That's where you find not only the car's recommended towing capacity but other important recommendations, such as towball download, speed limits when towing and use of load-levelling equipment. All of these are legally binding under the nationalised towing regulations released in December 1998.

One of our subscribers recently found out the hard way that he was legally unable to tow a new caravan with an expensive 4WD vehicle he had bought especially for the purpose. He had already taken it on two trips, but during the third saw the towbar starting to come away while towing the van. He was able to stop in time to avoid an accident, but not before the car had suffered chassis damage.



The van he had bought weighed under 1500 kg and the vehicle was rated to tow a much higher load. "I thought it to be a good combination for my upcoming retirement, so my wife and I could enjoy travelling," he said.

Neither the car nor caravan dealer, nor the place where he had the towbar fitted had made him aware of the car's relatively low towball load rating of 125 kg. (This is the amount of weight transferred from the caravan/trailer onto the rear of the towing vehicle via the coupling and towball.) The caravan's towball download was 140 kg unloaded (or 190 kg fully laden) — too heavy for the vehicle in question.

While this particular case is coming up for a fair trading hearing, we thought this subscriber's experience warranted a general warning to people who intend to buy a heavy vehicle for towing, or who are already towing a caravan or other type of trailer.

Check the towball download and other relevant ratings to make sure they're compatible. If the owner's handbook fails to provide this information (a few manufacturers don't record it there), request it in writing from the car dealer or customer service centre. This way you'll get accurate information you can refer to if queried at a later date.

Even if you've been towing a caravan/trailer for a while without problems, if you exceed the manufacturer's recommended towing limits you could be operating illegally, placing your insurance cover and vehicle warranty at risk and also leaving yourself open to a hefty fine.

Polywipes for paint — wort

Polywipes For Paint are marketed as the "professional handwipes" that "remove all types of paints". Their packaging is similar to the popular baby wipes — a plastic container with a slit at the top through which the individual sheets (50 in all, measuring 13 x 21 cm) can be pulled. When you're finished, the opening can be resealed with a plastic cap.

The small print states: "Polywipes for Paint cleans hands, tools and surfaces from all kinds of paint: acrylic paint, wet paint, water-based or solvent-based paints, varnishes and sealants ... For the best results clean the spills immediately with Polywipes." Ingredients include petroleum distillates, tetrasodium EDTA, organic esters and more, plus some gentler-sounding things like aloe vera and "Dead Sea minerals" to "leave your hands with a silky feel".

We put the manufacturer's claims to the test with an acrylic (water-based) paint, an oil-based paint and a varnish on three different surfaces:

- Metal — to resemble a screwdriver that some people use to stir paint.
- A timber surface coated with laminex, to resemble a kitchen bench.
- Hands — as most people end up with paint on their hands/fingers/arms while painting.

We cleaned up the two paint samples and the varnish immediately after the spill and after 5, 15 and 60 minutes, and 24 hours

UPDATE

HEALTH INSURANCE

CHOICE, JUNE 2001

On page 23 we said **DEFENCE HEALTH** was "available only to serving or ex-members of the Australian Defence Force or the ADF Reserve and their families...".

DEFENCE HEALTH has since informed us that ex-members of the ADF who aren't already members of the health fund have 12 months following their discharge in which to join, and that ADF Reserve members must join while still in the Reserve. Once membership is in place, it can be retained for life.

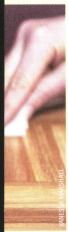
CORRECTION

STANDBY POWER CONSUMPTION

CHOICE, MAY 2001

On page 5 we wrote that the government's long-term goal is "for no appliance to use more than 1 W per year while on standby". We should have said "for no appliance to use more than 1 W while on standby". If such an appliance was on standby all year (for 8760 hours) it would use 8760 Wh per year, costing you about $1 in electricity.

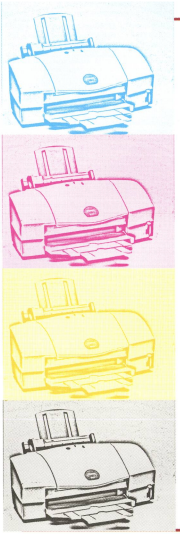
ne money?



(the last two for the metal and laminex surfaces only). Although the instructions say the spills should be cleaned immediately, you'd often notice the spill some time after it's dried, so we wanted to know if Polywipes still work then.

And do they? They removed all signs of paint and varnish easily from all our surfaces up to 15 minutes after the spill — though a lot of hard rubbing was required when removing water-based paint from them, and we used up to four wipes. Even an hour later, the oil-based paint and varnish spills could be removed from metal and laminex surfaces with a lot of hard rubbing and a few extra Polywipes. No paint or varnish could be removed after 24 hours.

So, for around $10 you can buy a pack of Polywipes and wipe away your paint and varnish. Or you could simply use a wet rag for water-based paint or a rag soaked in turps for oil-based paint — they'd do the job just as well, though they mightn't smell as good or leave your hands feeling "silky".



PICTURE-PERFECT PRINTER?

Buying a printer can be a tough task — a cheap one can cost more over time in running costs, even an expensive one doesn't guarantee results and, either way, printing in colour can take forever. To take some of the guesswork out of the process, *Computer* CHOICE put thousands of sheets of paper through 17 printers and came out with a clear winner.

- Overall the **CANON S800** at $649 is hard to beat for quality. It's significantly better than the rest in all print modes and its graphics and photo quality were described as "superb", "photographic" and other superlatives by our testers. It's not as fast as some, but if quality at a reasonable price is your main concern, it's the printer for you.
- The **CANON S400** ($249) is very economical to run and provides acceptable quality.
- If you're looking for an A3 printer, the **EPSON Stylus Color 1160** ($799) has good print performance in combination with reasonable running costs over three years.
- A fast printer is useful if you need to print large documents, photographs or complicated graphics. Most of the printers in this test do at least an adequate job. If speed is your main concern, the fastest were the **EPSON Stylus Color 980** ($849) and **EPSON Stylus Color 880** ($549).

In the July/August issue of *Computer* CHOICE there's lots more detail on the performance, speed and economy of all 17 printers, as well as advice on which are best suited to students, families, desktop publishing and a digital darkroom. To subscribe to *Computer* CHOICE, call 1800 069 552 or see page 49.

WORLD CONSUMER SNAPSHOT

ISN'T SCIENCE WONDERFUL...

Powering your mobile, MP3 or palmtop computer from your cardigan — surely the stuff of sci-fi? Or closer, perhaps, than you think, according to *New Scientist's* recent report on the development, by German scientists, of synthetic fibres that generate electricity when exposed to light.

The same magazine has a story for people in neighbourhoods with a high rate of shoe crime (well, we can't imagine what else it's for...). BBC International, a Florida-based company, is patenting training shoes with a loudspeaker in the sole. They also have an alarm and a motion sensor that trigger a scream and cries of "I am being stolen". The young, or young-at-heart, can play around with prerecorded messages such as "Outta my way".

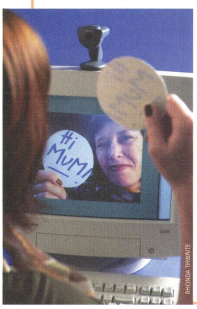
Road shadows

The province of Luxembourg, in Belgium, has found a way to scare off speeding drivers — scatter policemen along the highways. Metal silhouettes are covered with posters of policemen, then placed on road edges; according to the flesh-and-blood police, speeding on the highway's been reduced by 80%.

PRIMARY AUSSIE WOODCHIPS: NO THANKS!

Saving Australia's old-growth forests is important to Japanese consumers — so much so that they've written to the Premiers of NSW, Tasmania, Victoria and WA about the issue. The Japanese Consumer Union represents 30 million people, and has asked for an immediate halt to the "supply of woodchips from Australian primary (old-growth) forests to Japanese paper manufacturers". They request that these woodchips be replaced with plantation woodchips, due to their concerns about global warming and about the impact on biodiversity, including unique Australian wildlife such as the koala. Best keep our customers happy, eh?

Putting a face to the Web



JACKIE TAHERE

What do video conferencing, security surveillance and live image streaming have in common? Webcams. Approximately 11 million of these small, cheap digital cameras were sold last year worldwide, and they reached national attention in Australia recently when a man recorded pictures of his house being burgled using one set up to detect motion.

Our sister magazine, *Computer* CHOICE, recently tested 15 webcams under $200 for image quality and ease of use. While they were almost universally quick and easy to set up, only a couple in the test did an acceptable job, and price wasn't always an indicator of quality.

Picture quality varied widely between cameras and only a few models stood out from the crowd. Of these, the **KODAK DVC325 Digital Video Camera** ($170) produced the best-quality stills, while the **LG Digital Video Camera PC-UC35** produced consistently good-quality video as well as still shots. With a price tag of $109, it also stood out for value for money, making it our Best Buy.

For more information on these and other models tested, plus tips on getting the most out of your webcam, see *Computer* CHOICE, July/August 2001, or go to www.choice.com.au and type 'webcams' in the search box. If you'd like to subscribe to *Computer* CHOICE, call our Consumer Services on 1800 069 552 or see page 49.

In a nutshell

- Web cameras aren't really a substitute for a digital camera — images seem to be more aimed at functionality than quality.
- For the technically minded, webcams with CCD image sensors produced better-quality pictures than those with CMOS sensors.

Promising new treatment for osteoporosis

Bone is a living tissue in a constant process of renewal. As children and adolescents, we tend to grow more bone than we lose. After our mid 30s, the amount of bone lost is greater than the amount renewed. This process accelerates as we age, especially after menopause for women, so bone gradually becomes more porous and brittle, and consequently prone to fractures.

Existing medications for treating osteoporosis slow the rate of bone loss, but none can build new bone. However, there's a treatment with the potential to reverse bone loss now undergoing international clinical trials, with some promising early findings reported in the July/August issue of CHOICE *Health Reader.*

OSTEOPOROSIS AUSTRALIA

Osteoporotic bone.

The treatment uses parathyroid hormone, a substance normally produced in the body by the parathyroid glands (near the thyroid). Its function is to control the distribution of calcium and phosphate in the body, and it's been found to stimulate bone growth when it's injected.

In a recently reported study, 1637 postmenopausal women (average age 70) who'd had spinal fractures took calcium and vitamin D supplements plus a higher or lower dose of parathyroid hormone or a placebo once a day for two years.

For women taking the parathyroid hormone, the risk of any new spinal fracture was about two-thirds lower than those taking the placebo, and the risk of a moderate or severe fracture lower again. Non-spinal fractures were also reduced by about half. Women who'd received the higher-dose parathyroid hormone had higher bone mineral density measurements, but about the same number of fractures as the lower-dose group, suggesting no additional benefit.

The effects of the treatment took some time to kick in, however: non-spinal fracture rates were equivalent to those in the placebo group at first, and started to go down after nine to 12 months.

The final-stage clinical trials are still being completed, but the treatment could be approved in the US before the end of this year. However, as *Health Reader* points out, there are several potential problems with it:

- Side effects included nausea and headache (reported at a higher rate by the group taking the higher dose of the hormone) and dizziness and leg pain (reported at a higher rate on the lower dose).
- In a previous study, rats given parathyroid hormone developed bone cancers. Granted, they received very high doses for most of their lifetimes, and no studies on humans or primates have so far shown increased tumour rates. But if the drug is approved, it may be taken continuously for years, making an elevated risk of cancer at least biologically plausible.
- The drug is likely to be expensive, and since it's also given by injection, it will probably be used only for treatment of osteoporosis among those who've already had fractures, not for prevention.

Other stories you can read in the current issue of *Health Reader* include why big hips in women are a sign of good health, and how exercise can help arthritis of the knees. If you'd like to subscribe, call our Consumer Services on 1800 069 552.

YOUR LETTERS

VANESSA MARSHALL

Flavour over crema

Your April 2001 article on making espresso coffee was interesting, but missed a cheap and easy method of making delicious Italian-style coffee.

I grew up in an Italian family and have a taste for coffee made the traditional way: in a metal stovetop espresso machine. None of the Italian families I know ever had — nor aspired to have — an expensive machine of the style you described. They all made delicious coffee the traditional way (flavour was certainly important), but with no discussion of crema. I've had coffee brewed by others, obsessed about crema, in expensive machines, which wasn't a patch on the traditional flavour!

The essentials for brewing good coffee include:

- A good espresso-grind coffee (good quality doesn't have to be expensive).
- The right proportions of coffee and water for a full-bodied brew (not excessively strong).
- A stovetop metal espresso machine.
- Don't let the brew boil.
- For milk coffee use a small quantity of full-bodied coffee with lots of (hot) milk, rather than weaker coffee with less milk.
- Keep the machine clean — dismantle and wash it thoroughly after every use (or residues of oil from the coffee will go rancid and spoil the flavour).

These machines are now widely available — smaller ones can be purchased for as little as $20 or $30. They come in aluminium or stainless steel and consist of a vessel to hold the water, a funnel for the coffee and, screwed onto the top, a vessel for the completed brew. A ring-shaped rubber seal contains the steam within the vessel. The principles are essentially the same with the many designs — stainless steel versions are more expensive but can last a lifetime.

I'd advise any prudent consumer to try this method before investing in an expensive and bulky machine. If you don't succeed at first, ask an Italian to show you what you're doing wrong. Remember, good crema or not, it's the flavour that counts.

Sue Ieraci
Via Internet

Postcodes and car insurance premiums

I've always taken the time to shop around for comprehensive car insurance, and it has proven worthwhile. For a sports model of a common car I once owned and for a heavily modified vehicle, different insurers quoted a wide range of premiums. I'm now writing this letter to let you and other readers know what premium changes you can expect when you move and change your postcode.

My wife and I are with different insurance companies. When we advised them about our move from northern Victoria to central Victoria, near Melbourne, we received quite different responses. My premium and subsequent renewal was unaffected, as we were still considered to be living in the country. However, my wife was asked to pay an additional premium and her renewal was almost double last year's, as we're now considered to be living in a metropolitan area, according to her insurance company.

We received quotes from all the companies recommended in *Your car insurance toolkit* (CHOICE, August 1999) for both high and low-cost areas, and found wide discrepancies. Two companies considered us to be 'metropolitan', one 'country' and one neither metropolitan nor country but in some transition category.

A different classification of our postcode by one insurance company will save us over 40% this year. We'd suggest that anyone living near a major city do a quick ring-around when their insurance is due.

Alan Williams
Via Internet

Thanks — we agree you have to shop around.

THUMBS UP

- Without much ado, **MYER** in Perth offered S Ford a new VCR to the value of one she'd bought 18 months earlier. The old model had had recurring faults and the manufacturer had given her the runaround, unable to fix it. Needless to say, she picked a different brand this time.
- Michele Campbell of Brisbane awards a thumbs up to **ELECTROLUX**, which only charged her a callout fee and replaced the door of her upright **KELVINATOR** fridge/freezer free of charge. It was just out of its five-year warranty period when it had started to rust.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

We want to hear from you — your experiences help our research and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive outcomes you've had a to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us, too. Address these letters to *Thumbs Up* at the address on page 2.

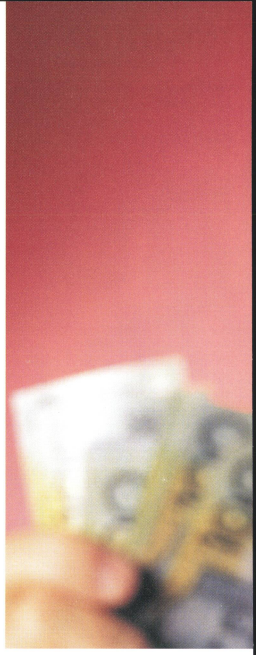
To thank you for writing to us, *Your Letters* awards a prize of a CHOICE book to the 'Letter of the month'. This month's winner, Alan Williams, receives *Eat GST-free* or any other book of his choice from Consumer Bookshelf, pages 40 to 42.

We're sorry we don't have the resources to answer all your letters personally, and in the magazine we may edit them or print only an extract. See page 2 for how to reach us.

The INVESTMENT EVANGELISTS are here!

Hallelujah?

Investment seminars promise heaven and earth — real fast. But do they deliver?



IN A NUTSHELL

- **The only one** *who's going to get rich quick from most investment seminars is the promoter, who'll be trying very hard to sell you something.*
- **Treat these seminars** *like door-to-door sales — don't sign up for anything on the night. Go home and think about it in the cold light of day.*
- **If it sounds too good** *to be true, it probably is — there's no easy way to get rich quick. And high returns entail high risks.*
- **So where can you get quality** *investment information or advice? Try seminars run by independent authorities, or talk to a licensed financial planner.*

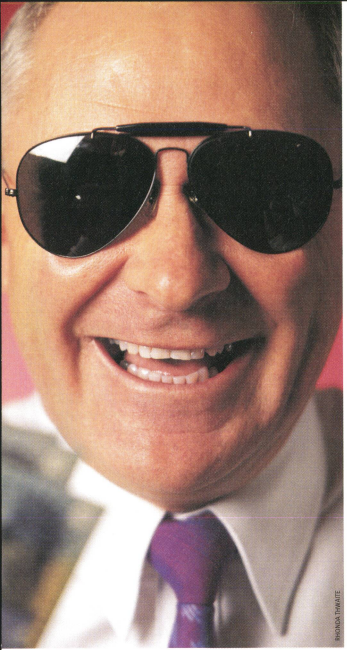
We've been waiting in the huge auditorium for half an hour, anticipation building with images of expensive cars, yachts, mansions and casinos projected on a giant screen, accompanied by loud, good-time, populist music. Finally, someone comes onto the stage.

An authoritative, besuited man takes the microphone to pump up the 800+ audience, to get us ready for the night that will change our lives forever. Tonight we say goodbye to a life of drudgery, financial pain and the boring job (stands for 'Just Over Broke' — ha ha) and hello to sports cars, French champagne and Lear jets. As he introduces the evening's presenter — who runs onto the stage in a confident, charismatic, showbiz style — the crowd erupts with cheers and clapping. They're pumped, all right.

And so the scene is set: welcome to the world of investment seminars. Or maybe that should read 'investment seminars' — genuine investment education is nothing like this. No glitz, no sports cars, no millionaires strutting their stuff. Just good solid information about the stock exchange, property, superannuation and other investment opportunities. See *Investor information sources*, page 10, for more about finding this.

However, the 'investment seminars' you're most likely to see being promoted in newspapers and magazines — and they're rapidly proliferating — will not be purely educational. There are two easy ways to spot them:

- They suggest you'll get very rich very quickly.
- They'll almost inevitably have something to sell you. Most often they're run by entrepreneurs trying to sell investment courses that cost thousands of dollars; others try to sell investment properties (on the Gold Coast, say) or financial services; and then there are software packages for share trading and other investment strategies.



IMAGEBANK

It's this type of seminar — whether it's called wealth creation or investment — that we'll concentrate on in this article.

Why a seminar?

Genuinely informative seminars can be an effective way to learn about the hows and wheres of investment, giving you a chance to ask questions and learn from the questions and input of others. Those offered by the Australian Stock Exchange, Australian Investors' Association, Centrelink's Financial Information Service and the Securities Institute are cases in point. But the evangelistic investment seminars we're talking about have their own special appeal, and certainly seem more attractive than a visit to a financial planner.

- The presenters are exciting role models. The seminars we went to were invariably run by alleged multi-millionaires who started from nothing and clawed their way up. They're now selling you their secrets so you can emulate them.
- They're cheaper — or at least they appear to be. Time spent with a good financial planner can cost a fair bit, whereas many of the widely advertised seminars are either free or of minimal cost (typically less than $100). However, a good financial planner is likely to give you better value for money, particularly when you discover that to get the *real* information from the evangelists, you'll have to fork out thousands more for courses and such.
- There's safety in numbers: you're an anonymous member of a crowd, and you're all in it together. This can work in favour of the people running the seminar — a large number of people joining up could give you a false sense of security ("it must be OK if everyone else thinks it's OK"). In addition, the buzz and excitement of the crowd may sweep you up with it.
- They offer greater rewards. Who wants to go to a staid old financial planner who tells you how to earn a steady (read 'boring') return on your capital, when you could live a glamorous lifestyle thanks to the millions promised by investment seminars? Well, let's just say that a steady return is better than nothing (or a loss…).

What investments do they promote?

We researched a whole range of seminars to see what was out there, and attended as many as possible. Investment strategies they advocated included:

- Learning a surefire way to trade shares — and win.
- Buying property and building a portfolio using 'OPM' (other people's money — a common requirement for all strategies). This in itself has many variations, but the general idea is that you're deep in debt, never sell any property, never pay off any of the loan principal and claim for every single tax deduction possible. Your fortune comes about by occasionally skimming off the capital gain (which is theoretical, based on valuations, since you don't actually sell the place) to live on or reinvest.
- Margin lending and negative gearing (risky strategies involving borrowing money to invest with no guarantee you'll make a profit) to buy shares, as well as other high-risk strategies such as call options on shares and property.
- Paying no tax, or as little as possible.
- Buying (overpriced) apartments interstate.
- A mixture of the above.

Many of the strategies are aimed at people who want to become very wealthy, rather than comfortably well off — and who preferably don't have much of a social conscience. The problem with these strategies compared with normal investment advice for amateurs can be summed up as follows:

- Investing in shares means hanging onto them for some time — not buying and selling at the drop of a hat, and certainly not trading call options.
- Investing in property involves making some sort of attempt to pay off the principal, and preferably buying property that will grow in value.
- Tax avoidance is not investment — and is potentially illegal.

Is the advice sound?

Unfortunately we can't tell you whether or not the strategies being promoted will work as promised. The level of information provided in the introductory seminars wasn't detailed enough to analyse fully. To get the necessary information we'd have to attend the courses at a total cost of tens of thousands of dollars.

However, we can make the following observations that warned us off the deals:

- In the cases where we were given snippets of information, the numbers may look good, but are based on long-term projections that we can't verify (and nor, incidentally, can they — not that it stops them). By contrast, prospectuses for investments can't legally make such over-the-top projections. However, we did consider some of the projections overly optimistic, particularly with regard to property growth.
- Expected future performance is often based on past performance: end of story. In fact, past performance is no indicator or guarantee of future performance — it's just a piece of information to use about an investment along with lots of other information.
- Gold Coast properties are often sold to people from interstate who know nothing about the Queensland or Gold Coast property market. People have been burnt, buying properties for a lot more than they're worth and being unable to rent them out.
- If you're borrowing against equity in your own home, you stand to lose it if something goes wrong and you can't afford to keep paying off the loan.
- Annual returns may be extrapolated from one-off short-term gains. Just because some share trader got lucky with a 25% gain in two weeks, that doesn't mean you can count on earning 650% per year.
- Many (but not all) strategies involve buying new rather than old property. Even though there's arguably greater tax benefit to be had, there are potential disadvantages, the main ones being that the property's value hasn't been tested in the marketplace and that you're paying a premium for new property that you may not get back.
- Many of the strategies aren't for the faint-hearted because you're in perpetual debt — a situation that's high-risk, and also one that many would feel uncomfortable about.
- Finally, in assessing the likely success of proposed investment strategies, what may work for some people wouldn't work for others — success is highly dependent on individual circumstances. Licensed financial planners are legally obliged to assess your individual needs and objectives, and make their recommendations accordingly.

In general we felt what was offered were aggressive investment strategies, often based on unrealistic projections. The Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) is very concerned about seminars that imply you'll get rich quick with no risk. Peter Kell, ASIC's Executive Director of Consumer Protection, says, "People are being told it's easy to make a lot of money quickly, but the risks and dangers aren't highlighted."

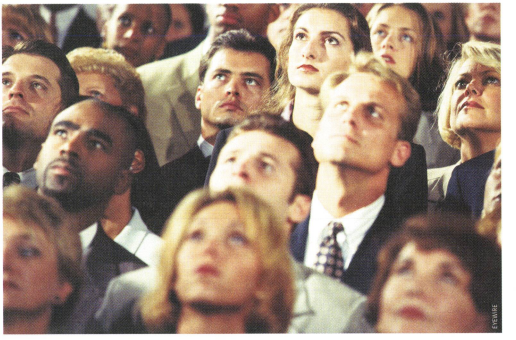
Remember, no matter how convincing the presenters are, high returns usually entail higher risks.

INVESTOR INFORMATION SOURCES

- The **Australian Stock Exchange (ASX)** runs several courses on investing in shares, covering topics suitable for both beginners and more seasoned investors. Courses range from $80 to $170. Their popular Investor Days give new and experienced investors a chance to talk to some of the main players, such as companies and stockbrokers. Visit its website, www.asx.com.au, or phone 1300 300 279.
- The **Australian Investors' Association (AIA)** is a collective for individual investors, and runs education conferences for people interested in learning about investment. Visit its website, www.investors.asn.au, or phone 1300 555 061.
- Centrelink's **Financial Information Service (FIS)** provides free investment information for individuals, as well as seminars and workshops. You don't have to be a Centrelink customer to make use of it, and if you'd prefer to use a language other than English, an interpreter can be provided. Call 13 10 21 to make an appointment with an information officer near you, or 13 63 57 for information about seminars and workshops. You can also visit its website: www.centrelink.gov.au (search for 'FIS').
- The **Securities Institute of Australia** runs courses that are generally more suited to advanced investors or people in the investment industry, and offers certificate, diploma and masters-level programs. Visit its website, www.securities.edu.au, or phone the office in your state.

These courses and seminars will help you with the basics, but for financial advice tailored to your situation and needs, consult a licensed financial adviser — see *More information*, page 12, for our article on choosing a good one.

So much for the entrée – what about the main course?



Many of the seminars we attended were merely a promotional tool for further courses, so we thought it would be interesting to find out about the quality of information given in them, the success rates of people who'd attended and their thoughts on the course.

In fact it's not easy to get this information — frustrating for us and for consumers. Even ASIC and the ACCC can't help with information about specific courses, although they may be able to help if there have been any official warnings issued or any other action taken against the principals conducting the seminar.

The main impediment is that people attending the courses are required to sign confidentiality agreements, stating that they won't reveal the contents of the course to anyone (to protect the presenters' 'intellectual property'). This means you can't even casually ask people what they learnt, much less consult an independent, unbiased critical review of the courses.

However, people *can* say whether they found a course useful, and whether they'd put strategies into play. From the limited discussion we've been able to access, people say they're useful, but don't appear to be living the high life seemingly promised. But many people don't actually put the strategies into practice — despite the thousands they've spent on courses.

Something else that caught our attention was the sales techniques used. A CHOICE reader told us that when she went on one such course, it started early in the morning and finished late at night. She felt her judgment was impaired by tiredness, and she wasn't thinking as critically or analytically as she'd like. The aim of this course was to encourage its participants to buy property — not a decision to be made under these conditions.

At one of the seminars we went to, we were told the first day of the real course started at 7 am and finished at midnight. That's not only a late finish, but a very long day. In this vulnerable state you're open to suggestion and might do something you later regret — think of the techniques some religious cults use to 'brainwash' members.

"If you're so rich, why do you need our money?"

If someone doesn't ask this question, the presenter will answer it anyway: why would they give up their time teaching you the secrets of their success? Sure, they

INVESTMENT POINTERS

Generally speaking, beware of:

- Schemes that suggest you borrow money to invest in shares (such as margin lending). You can make a lot more, but you can also lose a lot more.
- Share market education or computer software that focuses on trading (rather than long-term investment). 'Trading' is frequent buying and selling of shares; it requires making quick judgments about where the share market is heading.
- Tax avoidance schemes (which could also be illegal).
- High risk, high return — high-risk strategies aren't appropriate for many people.
- Ads with lots of exclamation marks, pictures of sports cars and promises of vast sums of money in no time.

Look for investments that:

- Are connected to your personal goals and situation, with an appropriate level of risk (so the seminar would have to explain how to assess your situation).
- Are diversified (for example, property *and* shares).
- Take a conservative approach towards borrowing to invest.
- Are not focused on share trading.
- Are conducted by people who are highly qualified, experienced and preferably licensed by ASIC.
- Are not conducted by cowboys or investment evangelists.
- Are not selling anything, be it further education, property, financial products or services.

Do you want to be a 95 percenter?

Seminar presenters try to frighten the audience by stating, "95% of you will be dead or dead broke when you're 65." Then they challenge you: "Do *you* want to be a 95 percenter?"

We wondered where they came up with this statistic. While it's hard to define 'dead broke', we can define dead, and something like 7% of middle-aged adults will die before 65.

As for 'dead broke', in these times of compulsory super contributions, the government estimates that around 45% of people will be on the full pension in 25 years' time (when the average audience member will be 65) — the rest of us will get more. Whether or not being on the full pension qualifies as 'dead broke' is open to debate.

But still, a grand total of 95% dead or dead broke? We don't think so.

MORE INFORMATION

CHOICE often has articles on financial planning and investment. Some useful starting points are:

- **Who do you trust with your life savings?** *(October 1998): how to choose a good financial planner.*
- **Share investing: how to do it right** *(June 1999).*
- **Buying an investment property** *(October 1997) and* **Inner-city apartments — seeing through the razzle dazzle** *(June 1999).*
- **Money for a lifetime** *(June 2000).*

Subscribers can phone for a free back copy: (02) 9577 3399.

- ***Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC)** — the government watchdog — can help you sort the lambs from the wolves. Phone its infoline on 1300 300 630 or visit its comprehensive website, www.asic.gov.au.*
- ***National Information Centre on Retirement Investments (NICRI).** Phone 1800 020 110 for its information leaflets, or visit its website, www.nicri.org.au.*
- ***Australian Shareholders Association** — phone 1300 368 448.*

make money doing the courses, but if their investment plans are so fantastic, they shouldn't need it.

Mostly, they say, it's about passion. They love what they do. They love getting up in front of an audience and educating them. Hey, it's an ego trip!

But when you look at the numbers, there's quite a lot of money in it — certainly once seminar attendees sign up for the courses. At one (free) seminar we attended, about half the 300 people present signed up for a course. With prices ranging from $3500 to $5500, that's around half a million dollars in revenue. These seminars are run once a week, with similar numbers involved.

You could entertain the idea that their strategies aren't nearly as successful as they'd have you think, and they make all their money from convincing-sounding seminars. But it's likely these people are just businessmen with fingers in lots of pies, the 'education' pie being one of them.

What you can expect at the seminar

- An inspiring rags to riches story.
- Pop-psychology motivational talk.
- Playing on your emotions. Presenters will try to rope you in by exploiting your fear, greed, egotism, envy and guilt. Lines we heard were that you'll be a poor pensioner when you retire (fear); you'll be the envy of all your friends and you'll be able to rub your enemies' noses in it (egotism); you owe it to your children (guilt). There were also plenty of lifestyle stories (and images) to make us envious and greedy.
- A sales pitch. This might be for further courses, software, financial services or property.
- A deluge of confusing information, possibly compounded by hunger and tiredness weakening your resolve and critical thought.
- The 'JOB = just over broke' joke.
- The '95% dead or dead broke' statistic (see *Do you want to be a 95 percenter?*, above).
- Enthusiastic testimonials and a few satisfied customers located in the audience to back up the presenter's claims.
- Dubious facts to back up their arguments. One presenter warned us that investing wasn't about tax deductions, and used Kerry Packer as a prime example: "He pays hundreds of millions of dollars in tax each year." Another presenter told us investing was all about tax deductions — and used Kerry Packer as a prime example: "He pays no tax."

What you shouldn't expect at the seminar

- Investment suggestions based on your individual circumstances and financial goals.
- Detailed information about how to become mega-rich and retire in five years — the details may come when you cough up several thousand for further courses. At the very best you'll get some advice and tips to get you thinking.
- Easy money. Getting rich usually involves hard work, particularly while you're building your capital. In fact you'll need money to do this.
- All the answers. Many people don't stop at one course — they go to several: possibly to get as broad a spectrum of strategies as possible, or possibly because they're not satisfied with the information they're getting.
- Recourse, if something goes wrong. On the other hand, if you're not happy with advice given by a licensed financial planner, you do have some recourse.

Still interested?

David Child, treasurer of the Australian Investors' Association (AIA), offers three tips for people considering taking up what's on offer:

- Never sign up at the time. There'll be a lot of pressure to do so, but if the offer is genuine it will still be around at a later point.
- Go home with as much documentation as possible. Read it carefully; contact ASIC and your state consumer affairs department and ask about the people; and seek professional advice on the offer from an accountant or financial planner.
- Make your final decision in the cool light of day, away from the hype.

And ASIC's Peter Kell cautions, "Don't get sucked in by the hype and the numerous testimonies from people who've allegedly made vast sums of money. Our experience is that too many people have been burnt chasing easy money and the regulator can't always retrieve their money when things fall apart."

Finally, and this is a point that was made to us over and over again: if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. ■

How's your BREAD SPREAD?

GETTY IMAGES

Saturated, unsaturated, omega 3 and omega 6 fats — the land of spreads is crowded and confusing. Here's how to choose wisely.

There are lots of spreads on the shelves to check for monounsaturated, polyunsaturated, saturated and trans fat and omega 3s. We analysed the fat content of around 80 dairy and margarine spreads to make the choice easier for you.

WHAT'S WHAT

Spreads have changed a lot. In fact, we could only find two spreads that can be classified as **margarine**: **NUTTELEX Polyunsaturated Table Margarine** and **NAYTURA Soya Polyunsaturated Spread**. When we last checked six years ago, there were 23. To be classified as margarine, the fat content of the spread must be at least 80%, which is the same minimum fat content as **butter** — the difference is the source of the fat. Fat in butter comes from milk fat or cream, while in margarine it's vegetable oil.

The disappearance of margarine seems to be a response to consumer demand for lower-fat products, though many spreads are still 70–75% fat.

Anything with less than 80% fat content is now called a **table spread**, which includes margarine spreads and dairy spreads. **Margarine spreads** are composed mainly of vegetable oil, while **dairy spreads** have some milk fat mixed with vegetable oil. The result is a butter-tasting spread with less saturated fat.

WHAT TO CHOOSE

When you're choosing a spread from our table (page 16), here's what to think about.

- Pick one with a **low total fat** content. Not only are you being kinder to your waistline, but too much fat in the diet has also been linked to certain forms of cancer.
- Look for a **low combined saturated and trans fat** content. The lower this is, the

If you really want the taste of butter, these three dairy spreads are a good choice. The Devondale Light is low in total fat (for a spread), while the two I Can't Believe products only have a maximum of 21% saturated and trans fats combined.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **The best choice** *for a spread is one that's low in total fat as well as in saturated and trans fats. We found plenty that match these criteria — see the table on page 16.*
- **Can a reduced-fat** *spread also taste good? Luckily, yes. See results of our taste test on page 14.*
- **Sadly** *for butter lovers, butter is too high in total and saturated fat to recommend for everyday eating, but a handful of dairy blends provide a healthier alternative with a similar taste — see below.*

RHONDA THWAITE

A WEIGHTY ISSUE

If you bought ***WEIGHT WATCHERS Whipped Monounsaturated Spread*** *you'd probably assume you're getting a spread that's significantly reduced in fat, if not by the brand name then by the claim on the package: "35% less fat per serve than butter or margarine". However, this spread is 70% fat, so according to the regulations it doesn't even fit into the reduced-fat category (which stipulates 31–60% fat). The story is that this spread is whipped, so per serve there's more air and less product for you to spread on your bread — and so hopefully you'll eat less fat. Even if you do spread less, we think you're better off using a reduced-fat margarine.*

happier your heart will be. The National Heart Foundation recommends saturated and trans fats together should contribute 28% or less of the total fat content.

Sadly for butter lovers there's no good news — it's 54% saturated fat. Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated table spreads are still the healthier option for your heart. If you just can't bring yourself to give up the butter taste or don't like the taste of margarine spreads, look for a **dairy spread** that's low in total fat as well as relatively low in saturated and trans fats. They should still have a buttery flavour, but some have less saturated fat than the real thing. Be careful, though: some dairy spreads are high in saturated and trans fat, such as the **SUNNYVALE Dairy Blend** with 61% of the two combined, as well as the same amount of total fat as butter.

Of the products we found, only the **I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S NOT BUTTER** varieties have less than 28% saturated and trans fat in the dairy spreads category, while **DEVONDALE Light** has the lowest total fat content of all the dairy blends and margarine spreads.

Seasonal variations in the fat content of the cream that's turned into butter can have an effect on the different fat types in butter and dairy blends. At certain times of the year the fat content may be slightly higher or lower, and so the nutrition information you see on the label will be an average.

On the **margarine spread** front, again look for a spread that's low in both total and saturated/trans fats. Fortunately many of the margarine spreads are lower than 28% combined saturated and trans, and we're luckier than our English cousins; our sister organisation in the UK found a margarine that was 21% trans fats alone!

You could also choose a monounsaturated spread made from canola or flaxseed oil so that you eat more omega 3 fatty acids. The two **MELROSE CARE** spreads are very high in omega 3s, and although they're 70% total fat, have less than 9% saturated and trans fat combined, making them a good choice despite their higher total fat content.

And as a general rule, whichever you choose, spread it thinly on the bread.

Soy and olive oil spreads: good for you?

Soy spreads

Soy products have been linked with many health benefits, but the lowest-fat soy spread, **ULTIMA Soya Spread**, is still 73% fat, and with 83% total fat **NAYTURA Soya Margarine** is the highest-fat choice of all of the spreads — so there are much lower-fat spread options to put on your bread, as well as better sources of soy such as yoghurt, tofu and milk. If you're eating these spreads because you follow a vegan diet, you'd be better off choosing the **GOLD'N CANOLA Lite** or **MELROSE CARE** products, which contain no animal products and are lower in total and saturated/trans fat.

Olive oil spreads

Piggybacking on the health success of olive oil, many olive oil spreads are now on the market. While they're a good source of monounsaturated fat, it's still more important to look at the total fat and saturated/trans fat content. For example, **OLIVE GROVE Extra Virgin Spread** and **Classic Spread**, while good sources of monounsaturated fat, are some of the highest in total fat. If you're keen on using an olive oil spread, try **OLIVIO Light Reduced Fat Spread** (55% total fat and a minimum of 55% monounsaturated). In addition, most olive oil spreads contain other types of vegetable oil too.

The moral? Don't assume a spread's a good choice just because the oil it comes from has a healthy image.

Spreads taste test

Product	Overall score (%)	Price per 100 g ($)
MEADOW LEA Logicol Lite	67	1.57
MEADOW LEA Lite	61	0.30
GOLD'N CANOLA Lite	58	0.39
OLIVE GROVE Lite	57	0.53
FARMLAND Canola Light	56	0.26
BECEL Light	54	0.40
FLORA Light	54	0.41
OLIVIO Light	50	0.54
SEACHANGE	50	0.40
MIRACLE Canolalite	48	0.39

CAN A SPREAD BE LOW IN FAT AND STILL TASTE GOOD?

We spent a day at a shopping centre in Sydney, getting over 100 shoppers to take part in our taste test of reduced-fat margarine spread served on bread. Funnily enough, it wasn't as easy as getting volunteers for our last test on ice cream! But thanks to everyone who helped.

The test included all the widely available reduced-fat spreads (to be called reduced-fat, a spread must contain 31–60% fat). The table on the left has the results. Trialists preferred spreads that had a fresh, natural, creamy and buttery flavour, and a smooth texture.

So is it worth giving them a try? Definitely. Many of the spreads rated quite well, but most popular overall was **MEADOW LEA Logicol Lite**. However, if you don't have a problem with cholesterol, it's not worth the expense — it costs more than five times as much as the next most popular, **MEADOW LEA Lite**. It's also not recommended for children and pregnant or breastfeeding women.

Unfortunately **MIRACLE Canolalite**, whose nutritional profile rated quite well, didn't do so well in the tasting stakes, and nor did **SEACHANGE** or **OLIVIO Light**.

NEW-AGE SPREADS

There are now four spreads on the market that claim to be 'cholesterol-lowering': **FLORA Pro-activ**, **MEADOW LEA Logicol**, **MEADOW LEA Logicol Lite** and **COLES Lo ♥ chol**. They contain plant sterols — natural substances that, over time, lower the level of LDL (bad) cholesterol by about 10% by competing with it for absorption in the body. Unfortunately they can also lower the absorption of important nutrients such as beta carotene, which forms vitamin A in the body.

There's debate about how much they do this, but if you're using these spreads it may be wise to increase your intake of beta carotene-rich foods such as green leafy vegetables and yellow and deep orange fruits and vegetables such as carrots and rockmelon. Better still, speak to a dietitian about modifying your diet to naturally reduce your cholesterol.

The Australia New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) recently banned all products other than margarine spreads that contain plant sterols. The problem is that there's insufficient data to show that eating them is safe at the higher levels of intake you'd expect from eating other products containing them, such as milk, yoghurt, mayonnaise and breakfast bars.

At the levels eaten in spread, plant sterols aren't considered a risk. However, the labels of spreads containing plant sterols must carry a warning that they're not appropriate for babies, children, pregnant or breastfeeding women. People using cholesterol-lowering medication should also get medical advice before using these spreads.

RHONDA THWAITE

VANESSA MARSHALL

Fat facts

There's a notion around that all fat is bad, but we need some in our diet to stay healthy. It's the type and the amount that are important. Fat comes in two main forms, saturated and unsaturated. Unsaturated fat includes monounsaturated, polyunsaturated and trans fat.

- **Saturated fat:** This is a 'bad' form of fat because too much of it can raise LDL cholesterol, which clogs your arteries and can lead to heart disease. Saturated fat is found in meat fat, butter, other dairy products and in coconut and palm oil, which are used to manufacture biscuits, pastries and cakes because they're cheap and store well.
- **Monounsaturated fat:** This helps to lower the level of LDL cholesterol and raise levels of desirable HDL cholesterol, which collects cholesterol from the artery walls and returns it to the liver. Together with polyunsaturated fat, include it in your diet as a replacement for saturated fat. It's found in high quantities in canola and olive oils and spreads.
- **Polyunsaturated fats:** These are found mainly in plant foods. They're excellent at lowering the level of LDL cholesterol but at the same time can lower HDL levels.
- **Omega 3 and 6 fatty acids:** These are two types of polyunsaturated fatty acid. They're vital for our health, but the key is to get a balance. Omega 6 polys are more prevalent in our diet, so people tend to eat more of them, but you can balance this by choosing a monounsaturated spread containing omega 3s, such as those made from canola or flaxseed oil.
- **Trans fatty acids:** Trans fats may increase LDL cholesterol levels and decrease the HDL levels, essentially having the same effect in your body as saturated fat. They occur naturally in small amounts in butter, but are also formed when oils are hydrogenated or hardened to form margarine. It's important to cut down on them as much as possible.

For more on fat types and fat in your diet, see *Fats ain't fats*, CHOICE, October 2000, or go to **www.choice.com.au** and type 'fat' in the search box.

Fat content of spreads

The spreads in the table are grouped into the categories 'butter', 'dairy blends', 'margarines' and 'margarine spreads'. Within the categories they're listed from lowest to highest total fat content. Look for ones low in total fat, and low in saturated and trans fat.

Product name (from lowest to highest total fat, by category, alphabetical when equal)	Total fat (as % of product)	1 Fat content (% monounsaturated, polyunsaturated, saturated/trans combined)
BUTTER	80	23 / 3 / 71
Dairy blends		
DEVONDALE Light	40	43 / 13 / 44
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S NOT BUTTER Light Table Spread	55	40 / 10 / 21
DEVONDALE Extra Soft	59	43 / 13 / 45
DEVONDALE Extra Soft Salt Reduced	59	43 / 12 / 45
COUNTRY GOLD Butter Softened Dairy Blend	70	41 / 11 / 47
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S NOT BUTTER Table Spread	70	40 / 10 / 21
NO FRILLS Dairy Blend	70	39 / 12 / 50
WESTERN STAR Spreadable	70	38 / 12 / 51
WESTERN STAR Spreadable Salt Reduced	70	38 / 12 / 50
COUNTRY GOLD Soft'n Light	80	42 / 12 / 47
HOME BRAND Dairy Blend	80	39 / 10 / 52
DEVONDALE Dairy Soft	81	38 / 10 / 53
DEVONDALE Dairy Soft Salt Reduced	81	33 / 10 / 57
SUNNYVALE Dairy Blend	81	24 / 15 / 61
FARMLAND Dairy Blend	82	39 / 10 / 52
FARMLAND Reduced Salt Dairy Blend	82	38 / 9 / 53
Margarines		
NAYTURA Soya Polyunsaturated Margarine	83	27 / 42 / 31
NUTTELEX Polyunsaturated Table Margarine	83	30 / 42 / 28
Margarine spreads		
BECEL Diet Polyunsaturated Reduced Fat Spread	47	40 / 40 / 20
FLORA Light Reduced Fat Spread	47	25 / 40 / 27
MEADOW LEA Logicol Lite Canola Spread	49	45 / 20 / 27
FARMLAND Canola Light Margarine Spread	55	52 / 24 / 24
MIRACLE Canolalite Spread	55	45 / 20 / 26
OLIVIO Light Reduced Fat Spread	55	55 / 10 / 28
SEACHANGE Margarine Spread	55	47 / 26 / 26
GOLD'N CANOLA Lite Spread	60	45 / 20 / 27
MEADOW LEA Lite 25% Less Fat	60	43 / 20 / 27
OLIVE GROVE Lite Reduced Fat Spread	60	40 / 20 / 28
MIRACLE Canola Salt Reduced	61	45 / 20 / 26
FLORA Pro-activ Spread	64	33 / 46 / 22
COLES Lo Chol Spread	65	40 / 20 / 28
DAFFODIL Spread	65	48 / 27 / 26
ECHO VALLEY Canola Margarine Spread	65	54 / 22 / 24
ECHO VALLEY Regular Margarine Spread	65	53 / 23 / 25
MEADOW LEA Logicol Canola Spread	67	52 / 26 / 23
BECEL Polyunsaturated Salt Reduced Spread	70	40 / 40 / 20
BERTOLLI Classico	70	55 / 10 / 28
BERTOLLI Extra Virgin Spread	70	55 / 10 / 28
BI-LO Canola Margarine Spread	70	52 / 22 / 25
BI-LO Margarine Spread	70	54 / 21 / 25
COLES Sunspread Salt Reduced	70	52 / 22 / 26
FARMLAND Margarine Spread Salt Reduced	70	53 / 22 / 25

DON'T BE FOOLED

A margarine spread labelled as 'cholesterol-free' must surely be better for you than one that's not, right? Wrong. All margarine spreads are cholesterol-free. Cholesterol comes from animal products — no table spread based on vegetable oil contains any cholesterol, so don't be swayed by this claim. Dairy spreads, on the other hand, contain some cholesterol from their milk fat content.

Product name (from lowest to highest total fat, by category, alphabetical when equal)	Total fat (as % of product)	1 Fat content (% monounsaturated, polyunsaturated, saturated/trans combined)		
FLORA Canola Spread Salt Reduced	70	45	20	26
FLORA Country Style Spread	70	25	40	27
FLORA Mono Sun Spread Salt Reduced	70	55	12	27
FLORA Salt Reduced Spread	70	25	40	27
GOLD'N CANOLA Spread	70	51	25	24
HOME BRAND Canola Margarine Spread	70	55	22	24
HOME BRAND Margarine Spread	70	55	23	22
HOME BRAND Salt Reduced Polyunsaturated Table Spread	70	31	42	27
MEADOW LEA Canola Spread Salt Reduced	70	43	20	27
MELROSE CARE Omega Blend Table Spread	70	58	33	9
MELROSE CARE Omega Ultra Table Spread	70	57	35	9
OLIVIO Spread	70	55	10	28
SAVINGS Salt Reduced Margarine Spread	70	52	22	26
TABLELANDS Spread	70	54	24	23
TABLELANDS Salt Reduced Cholesterol Free Spread	70	55	23	22
VITA-LITE Canola Reduced Salt	70	53	24	23
WEIGHT WATCHERS Whipped Mono-unsaturated Spread	70	50	25	25
ULTIMA Soya Spread	73	33	42	25
BI-LO Salt Reduced Margarine Spread	75	50	24	26
BLACK & GOLD Mono-unsaturated Margarine Spread	75	49	25	26
BLACK & GOLD Salt Reduced Polyunsaturated Margarine Spread	75	54	22	24
COLES Soy Spread	75	35	33	31
COLES Sunspread Canola Margarine Spread	75	51	23	26
COLES Sunspread Cholesterol Free	75	52	23	25
COLES Sunspread Salt and Milk Free	75	51	23	26
MEADOW LEA Milk Free	75	45	20	27
MEADOW LEA Original Spread	75	25	40	28
MEADOW LEA Salt Reduced	75	25	40	28
NO FRILLS Canola Spread	75	51	23	26
NO FRILLS Margarine Spread	75	54	21	25
NO FRILLS Margarine Spread Salt Reduced	75	54	21	25
OLIVE GROVE Classic Spread	75	40	20	28
OLIVE GROVE Extra Virgin Spread	75	40	20	28
SAVINGS Margarine Spread	75	30	43	28

KEY: Monounsaturated fat; Polyunsaturated fat; Saturated and trans fat combined

All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

1 Fat content

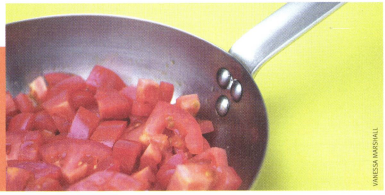
This shows the breakdown of different types of fat that make up the total fat content — see the key, below left.

There's a gap at the end of some bars because the fatty acid profile is based on the maximum levels of saturated and trans fats, and the minimum levels of poly- and monounsaturated fats. This is in order to take seasonal variations into account, which may affect all fats to some degree.

Trans fats are normally included in the mono- or polyunsaturated figures on a nutrition panel. We've included them with saturated fat in order to group all the 'bad' fats together.

CHOICE TIP: Cooking with fat

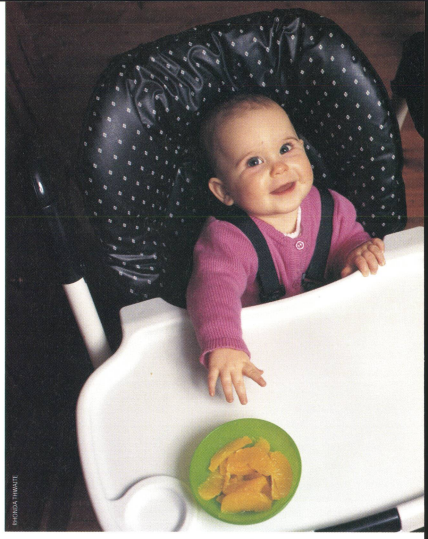
Because some reduced-fat spreads have a higher water content they're not suitable for certain types of cooking. As a guide, if a spread is 60% or more fat, it can be used as a replacement for butter or margarine. If it's 50–59% fat it'll still work well for most cooking; but if the fat content is less than 49%, it won't work for baking or frying.



VANESSA MARSHALL

Sitting UP HIGH

As with most other children's products in Australia, there's no mandatory standard for highchairs. We think most of the models in our test are potentially unsafe.



IN A NUTSHELL

- **None of the 12** *highchairs tested passed all our tests for safety, stability, hazards, strength and durability.*
- **Only five models passed** *our most important safety test; seven others failed stability requirements.*
- *See page 20 for* **What to look for** *in a highchair: hints on safety, comfort and ease of use.*

When a baby can sit up independently, a highchair comes in very handy at mealtimes. We tested 12 widely available models for safety and ease of use.

As with most other children's products, there's no mandatory standard for highchairs, but a draft voluntary Australian standard (*DR 99531 High chairs — Safety requirements*) has been circulating since December 1999. We now hear it may be changed again but still hope it'll be finalised soon, and that the final version includes one point that was missing: a five-point safety harness.

About 25% of nursery furniture accidents involve highchairs, mainly due to children standing up and attempting to climb out of the chair. An effective five-point harness used with the chair can substantially reduce the injury risk. We made it part of our safety assessment.

Minor faults and major shortcomings

We based our test methods on the draft standard. Had we interpreted it rigidly, none of the highchairs tested would have passed. We were less than dogmatic, but still can't recommend any of the chairs unreservedly.

Each time a chair failed one of our tests, we considered its potential to harm a child sitting properly in it. We looked critically at finger entrapment hazards like holes or crevices, sharp burrs or edges, and scissoring action of folding parts.

If the fault was unlikely to cause serious harm to the child, we recorded a 'pass with minor fault' rather than a fail — for example, crevices underneath the tray or armrest, holes that aren't easily accessible to a child, or pinching hazards for the carer but not the child.

However, we think those highchairs that failed our stability tests and tipped over — seven of the 12 tested — could seriously compromise a child's safety. They're therefore listed as having major stability problems in the table overleaf.

MODELS WITH MINOR HAZARDS

None of the highchairs tested can be recommended without reservation. However, the five models below passed all our stability tests and had comparatively few minor safety hazards.

BABYCO Angelico	$190
CHICCO Mamma Classic	$281
CHILDCARE Eleganza CC800	$209
IKEA Vitnos	$98
INFA Grove 505	$159

Profiles

Profiles are of the models with only minor hazards, in alphabetical order from left to right. Prices are what we paid in March 2001.

BABYCO ANGELICO

Price: $190

GOOD POINTS

- Shoulder straps are mounted on the seat's back — see the picture and caption in *What to look for*, page 21, for more on this.
- Horizontal and crotch bars — see *What to look for.*
- Easily adjustable seat height.
- Readily removable padding.

BAD POINTS

- The seat isn't quite deep enough for bigger children and is obstructed by the horizontal bar.
- The tray is a bit difficult to attach.
- Bulky when folded.

THE PROBLEMS

- Finger entrapment and injury hazards: sharp metal corner under the tray.
- Pinching hazard (to the carer) near the folding mechanism.
- The attachment rings for the harness allow a lot of movement, which could be a problem with an active child.

IKEA VITNOS

Price: $98

GOOD POINTS

- Horizontal and crotch bars.

BAD POINTS

- The tray is very difficult to attach and remove. It's easier just to leave it attached.
- The seat height isn't adjustable.
- The chair comes in pieces and is very difficult to assemble.

THE PROBLEMS

- No safety harness, though you can buy a waist strap for it for $20.

CHICCO MAMMA CLASSIC

Price: $281

GOOD POINTS

- Shoulder straps are mounted on the seat's back.
- Easy to put the child in and take them out of the chair.
- The tray is easy to attach, remove and adjust with one hand.
- Easily adjustable seat height.
- Readily removable padding.

BAD POINTS

- Bulky when folded.
- Length of crotch strap isn't adjustable.

THE PROBLEMS

- The attachment rings for the harness showed damage after our 'pull' test.

INFA GROVE 505

Price: $159

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to put the child in and take them out of the chair.
- The tray is easy to attach, remove and adjust with one hand.
- Very easily adjustable seat height: with one hand and without bending.
- Readily removable padding.

BAD POINTS

- Shoulder straps attached to the waist strap.
- Not foldable.

THE PROBLEMS

- Finger entrapment and injury hazards: at the rear corners of the seat (partly covered), tray and armrest undersides, along the armrests and along the frame tubing.
- Pinching hazard: be careful not to pinch your child's fingers when attaching the tray.
- The attachment rings for the harness allow a lot of movement, which could be a problem with an active child.

CHILDCARE ELEGANZA CC800

Price: $209

GOOD POINTS

- Shoulder straps are mounted on the seat's back.
- Horizontal and crotch bars.
- Easily adjustable seat height.
- Readily removable padding.

BAD POINTS

- The seat isn't quite deep enough for bigger children and is obstructed by the horizontal bar.
- The tray is a bit difficult to attach.
- Bulky when folded.

THE PROBLEMS

- Finger entrapment and injury hazards: sharp metal corner under the tray.
- Pinching hazard (to the carer) near the folding mechanism.

What about the rest?

All the other highchairs tested failed our stability tests and can tip over, endangering the child's safety.

These models also revealed similar hazards to the five profiled in safety tests for finger entrapment, pinching and minor injury risks. The PEG PEREGO also presented another, potentially dangerous entrapment problem when being moved between a reclining and upright position — see the picture and caption in *What to look for*, page 21, for more on this.

STOP PRESS

As we went to press, news came in from the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) that the PEG PEREGO Prima Pappa had just been recalled in the US — for exactly the problem our tests had identified (see the photo, page 21). PEG PEREGO and CPSC have received 51 reports of entrapment when children put their arms or heads in the space between the armrest and backrest. There were four reports of scratched heads or arms or bruising, but none of suffocation.

Brand / model (in alphabetical order within groups)	FEATURES 1 Five-point harness	2 Number of seat positions (if it reclines)	3 Adjustable height / number of positions	4 Foldable / locks in folded position	5 Number of tray positions	SPECIFICATIONS 6 Seat width x depth (mm)*	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)**
MINOR HAZARDS										
BABYCO Angelico	✓✓	4	✓ / variable	✓ / ✗	1	285 x 200	1	China	Babyco	190
CHICCO Mamma Classic **(A)**	✓✓	3	✓ / 6	✓ / ✓	2	300 x 240	1	Italy	Childcare	281
CHILDCARE Eleganza CC800 **(B)**	✓✓	4	✓ / variable	✓ / ✓	1	285 x 200	1	China	Childcare	209
IKEA Vitnos					1	215 x 280	**(F)**	Sweden	Ikea	98
INFA Grove 505	✓		✓ / 6		3	315 x 200	ns	Taiwan	Infa	159
MAJOR STABILITY PROBLEMS										
CAM Futura	✓		✓ / 7	✓ / ✗	5	280 x 230	1	Italy	Babyco	162
LOVE N CARE Executive 8206 **(C)**	✓	2	✓ / 6	**(D)**	8	280 x 240	ns	ns	EIC	195
MOTHER'S CHOICE 6638-TR	✓		✓ / 3	✓ / ✗	1 **(E)**	265 x 255	1	China	IGC	153
PEG PEREGO Prima Pappa	✓	4	✓ / 7	✓ / ✓	2	290 x 200	ns	Italy	Housewares Int'l	256
STEELCRAFT 31130	✓		✓ / 6		2	300 x 250	**(G)**	Taiwan	Britax	170
TARGET HCZTZ302	✓			✓ / ✓	4	275 x 250	**(H)**	Taiwan	Target	70
VALCO Rapid Fold	✓			✓ / ✗	3	300 x 210	ns	Taiwan	Valiant	107

None of the highchairs in the test passed all our safety tests. Only one, the **IKEA Vitnos**, passed all tests based on sections of the draft standard concerning stability, hazards, strength and durability, but it has no safety harness, which we think is very important. (It has a crotch bar instead, and a simple waist strap available at extra cost.)

The five models that passed our stability tests but failed one or more of the other tests are the 'models with minor problems' profiled on page 19. Included in each profile is what the problems are.

In the absence of an Australian standard, several distributors (Britax, Childcare, IGC, Ikea, Housewares International) say they import products that conform to other standards (UK, US, European). Unfortunately not all these standards are as stringent in their tests for stability as the draft Australian standard and our own lab tests. We think our tougher tests are justified: you need to be sure a toddler can't pull the highchair over or your baby tip themselves out of it.

Easy to use?

All the highchairs tested are relatively easy to use. However, with some it's easier to put a child in, put on the harness, attach the tray, adjust the seat height or fold and unfold it. See the profiles for particulars and *What to look for*, right, for ease of use aspects that apply to most chairs. ■

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

SAFETY

- A **five-point harness** helps prevent a child from falling out of the seat or climbing out of the chair — see note 1, above right. (A three-point harness is better than none at all, but allows more freedom for a child to clamber about.) The harness buckles should be quick and easy for you to engage, but not easy for a child to release. The length of straps should be adjustable. (See the photo, below right.)
- **Construction** and **framework** should be sturdy and robust enough to carry the weight of a child. Put some weight on the seat and backrest to see if they squeak, sag, deform, move out of position or collapse.
- For **stability**, the legs should taper out or extend outwards, preferably farther than all other parts of the chair.
- **Hazards:** No parts when moved should be able to pinch, crush or trap a child's finger, toe, limb or head. Check for sharp edges and points along the edges of the chair and tray, and easily detachable parts that could pose a choking hazard.
- A **crotch** or **vertical bar** at the front of the seat (or, alternatively, a **crotch strap**,

PHOTOS: RHONDA TINNIKIT

A horizontal bar at the front of the seat helps prevent a child from falling forward once the tray is removed. However, it can also make it more awkward to put the child into the chair, or limit its use once the baby grows bigger.

* *Rounded to the next 5 mm, padding in place.*

** *Prices are those we paid in March 2001.*

ns *Not stated.*

(A) *The distributor told us this chair wouldn't be available when we published, but we still found it in several shops in June 2001. They also said they'd make some changes in light of our test findings.*

(B) *The distributor told us it'd make some changes in light of our test findings.*

(C) *The distributor told us this chair had been discontinued in January 2001, but we bought it in March and a shop told us in June that it could easily get one in.*

(D) *The seat can be removed from the stand and used as a seat that clips onto the edge of a table.*

(E) *Tray swings over.*

(F) *Ikea says it has an 'open return' policy on faulty products, with no time limit.*

(G) *Three months replacement, one year repair.*

(H) *Target says the product is subject to its normal returns policy.*

None of the highchairs tested can be recommended without reservation, but five models failed comparatively few minor safety tests. They're listed under '**minor hazards**'. The rest failed our stability tests and can tip over, endangering the child's safety; they're listed under '**major stability problems**'.

1 Harness

All but one of the models tested have a five-point harness to restrain a child and prevent them from falling or climbing out of the chair.

✔✔ = The shoulder straps are mounted on the back of the seat at shoulder height.

✔ = The shoulder straps are attached to the waist strap.

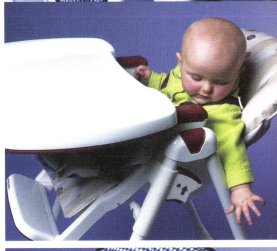
A simple waist strap is available for $20 for the **IKEA Vitnos**.

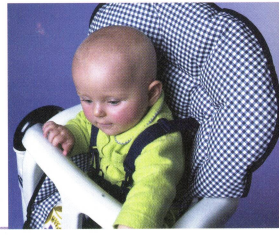
2–6 Features and specifications

These are discussed in *What to look for*, below.

WHAT TO KNOW MORE?

For profiles of all the models tested, go to www.choice.com.au; just type '**highchairs**' *in the search box.*





preferably wide and firm) helps prevent the child from sliding forwards.

Although the draft Australian standard doesn't allow **castors** on highchairs, most of the models tested have them. We considered them to be acceptable if at least the front or rear castors have brakes, or if there's just one set of two. What's most important is that you **always remember to lock them** when you put your child into the chair.

COMFORT AND EASE OF USE

As the table shows, the **seat** width and depth can vary considerably between chairs. So if you're planning to use a chair for several years, choose one with a larger seat. Some chairs (the **INFA** in our test) have booster padding for smaller children.

The **tray** should be secure when it's fitted but easy to remove, attach and adjust (if applicable).

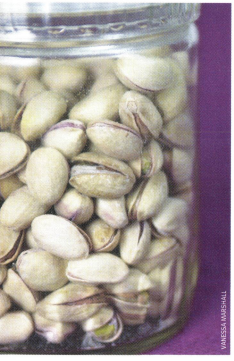
If the chair is **height-adjustable** (or the seat **reclinable**), test the mechanisms. They should be easy for you (but not for a child) to lock and unlock. The locks should either be difficult for a seated child to reach or require some dexterity to release. Also see the photos, above right, for a hazard to look out for with a reclining mechanism.

A **foldable** chair should be easy to fold and preferably lock into position. The more compact when folded, the easier it is to store.

A **footrest** or leg support is important to support the child's feet or calves. All models tested have one (on the **IKEA Vitnos** it's just a rung), but none is height-adjustable.

An adequate side barrier or armrest can prevent a child from sliding sideways out of the seat. But it should move with the chair when you push it from the reclined into the upright position, as on the the Babyco (top right). On the Peg Perego (centre right) it's stationary and has the potential to trap a child's arm, head or neck if you're pushing it upright without watching the child, or another child does so. The instructions say you can make the adjustment while the child's in the chair, but you'd need to take care.

It's easier to restrain a child in a five-point harness if the shoulder straps are mounted on the back of the seat at shoulder height, as pictured right. If they're attached to the waist strap, they're harder to find, unless you spread out the harness before you sit the child down.


VANESSA MARSHALL

Robotic eating

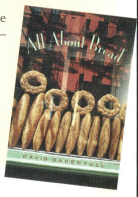
How would you feel about being brainwashed by food companies into eating particular products? According to a recent article looking at future food technology, it may not be very far away.

The report suggests that by using MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) techniques to identify the areas of the brain that react to pleasant and unpleasant stimuli, together with studies of social behaviour, new products could be developed that make you feel good, increasing the chance of repeat purchase. Manufacturers and retailers would then be able to offer a smaller range of products with guaranteed sales. We're not sure consumers would be quite as thrilled at being manipulated in this manner and losing their freedom of choice. Let's hope this technology remains in the realms of science fiction.

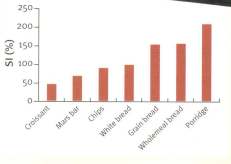
How full are you?

The satiety index (SI) is a useful nutritional tool recently developed by Dr Susanne Holt and her colleagues at the University of Sydney. It compares how full different foods make us feel for the same calorie intake. White bread is given a rating of 100 and the SI for all other foods is based on this standard.

The graph below compares the SI values for some different foods, and shows that wholemeal bread and grain bread are more filling than white bread — and that all these breads are more filling than croissants or Mars bars. But plain, old-fashioned porridge was the most satisfying of the lot — obviously a good choice for breakfast.

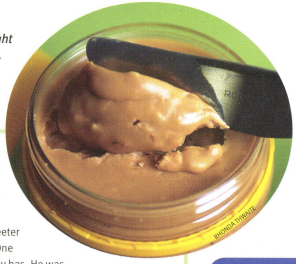


From: All About Bread, CHOICE Books, 2001. See page 41 for more about the book and how to order it.



A nutty tip

Keep fresh nuts in airtight containers in the fridge. They'll stay fresh longer.


VANESSA HOSKING

LESSON IN LABELLING

Have you tried Kraft's new Light peanut spread and noticed it's quite a bit sweeter than the full-fat version? One CHOICE subscriber certainly has. He was surprised to find that the sugar content of the reduced-fat version is nearly four times that of the regular one. The regular version has 1.6 g of sugar per 20 g serve (one tablespoon), while the reduced-fat version contains 6.1 g per serve.

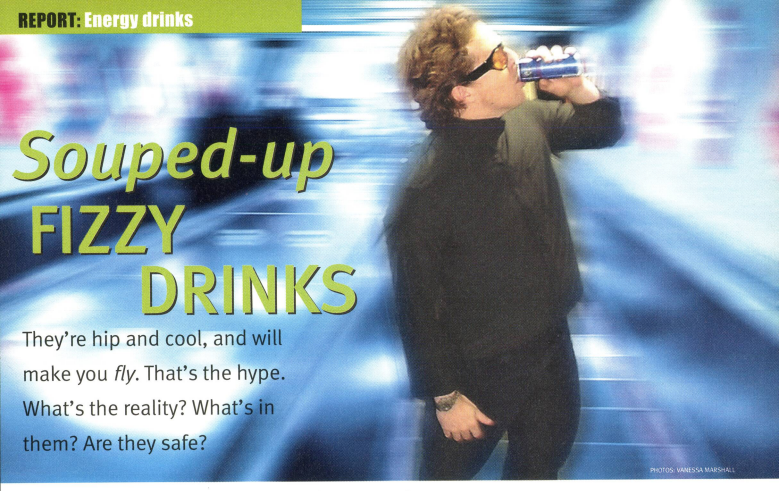
Manufacturers often increase the amount of sugar in reduced-fat products to compensate for the loss of taste that comes with less fat. In this case it's certainly quite a significant increase. However, not only has the sugar increased, the amount of peanuts has decreased, replaced by maltodextrin, a bulking agent. So what you're getting is not just a reduced-fat version of the regular peanut butter, but a peanut spread with a lot more sugar and a lot fewer peanuts.

This is a classic example of why it's worth reading the nutrition panel and not just relying on the claims made in large print.

Innovation: grape tomatoes

From the world of fruit and veg come grape tomatoes, which are about the size of green grapes. They're full of beta carotene, vitamins B and C, iron, zinc, potassium and lycopenes, so not only are they an ideal size to snack on, they're good for you too.

VANESSA MARSHALL



Souped-up FIZZY DRINKS

They're hip and cool, and will make you *fly*. That's the hype. What's the reality? What's in them? Are they safe?

PHOTOS: VANESSA MARSHALL

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Most 'energy drinks'** *have an effect because they contain caffeine. So it's probably best to drink them instead of coffee or tea rather than as well.*
- **Many of the other ingredients** *(amino acids, herbals, etc) that the drinks base their claims on face a lack of clear scientific evidence about their safety and/or efficacy. Some (like vitamin A) are known to be potentially harmful in large doses.*
- **Despite this, manufacturers** *are freely advertising the drinks with claims about their effects on your mood, health or performance, without having to place caveats or warnings on their labels.*
- **Drinks containing caffeine** *and guarana (a source of caffeine) should carry clear warning labels that they're not suitable for children.*

Take a common fizzy drink, add caffeine (sometimes in the form of guarana — a plant extract that contains caffeine), plus a concoction of vitamins, minerals and amino acids, perhaps a spattering of herbal ingredients and hey presto, you've got a trendy new energy drink.

There are also a few new-age drinks that don't add caffeine or guarana but are marketed on other 'functional' ingredients (ones that are claimed to have an effect beyond their nutritive value) — amino acids again, plus herbs claimed to have a calming effect or to boost the immune system, for example.

But do they do what they promise — everything from "giving you wings" or "boosting your immune system" to giving you "the ultimate high"?

We've checked the ingredients, assessed the claims and measured their caffeine content, and we're less than impressed.

CAFFEINE

Most of these drinks contain caffeine — some have about the same amount as a strong cup of instant coffee (around 80 mg per can), while others are closer to a can of Coke (around 50 mg) or a cup of tea (40 mg). The table on page 27 lists the caffeine content of the energy drinks we looked at. Also see the caffeine content of tea, coffee and other drinks on page 26 for comparison.

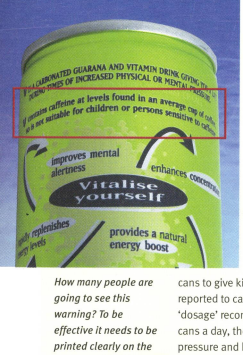
Does it work?

Around 40 mg of caffeine has been reported to enhance mood and increase energy, alertness and concentration. However, that depends on how used you are to caffeine, how well you metabolise it and whether or not you're suffering withdrawal after earlier caffeine intake.

Is it safe?

Children are the biggest worry when it comes to the caffeine content of these drinks (see *Kids, teenagers and caffeine*, page 24, for more). But pregnant women should also be wary, as studies have shown that a miscarriage in the first three months is more likely in women who have more than 100 mg of caffeine daily.

And while rare, deaths from caffeine toxicity have occurred. A woman died in Perth recently after consuming a "natural energy" guarana drink (with a caffeine level equivalent to 10 cups of coffee — that product has since been taken off the market). It later emerged that she had a previously diagnosed mitral valve prolapse, a heart abnormality found in 2.4% of the population. She had seen



How many people are going to see this warning? To be effective it needs to be printed clearly on the front of the can.

Kids, teenagers and caffeine

Kids are falling for energy drinks in a big way. A recent Australian study found that 27% of 8–12-year-old boys, 12% of 8–12-year-old girls, 24% of 12–18-year-old boys and 20% of 12–18-year-old girls had had at least one energy drink in the two weeks prior to the survey. It's thought that parents may also be buying these drinks for their kids, probably under the misguided assumption that they're better than soft drinks because they're called energy drinks.

These drinks are particularly high in caffeine, and it only takes one or two cans to give kids more than the amount that's been reported to cause increased anxiety. And if they had the 'dosage' recommended for some of the products of five cans a day, they'd also get enough to increase blood pressure and heart rate (and even cause palpitations), along with jitters and possible sleep disturbances. They can also suffer withdrawal symptoms (headaches and lethargy) when they stop taking in caffeine.

The food regulator ANZFA suggests that the new standard for these drinks should require a warning on the container saying they're not suitable for children and that the caffeine level should be listed. We're not convinced this'll make much difference unless the warnings are planted clearly on the front of the can. Already some of the energy drinks on the market carry warnings, but the information is usually on the back of the can or bottle, in small writing, obscured by other claims and bright colours (see left for an example).

A further study found that some teenagers are drinking up to five cans of energy drink before sporting events, believing it will boost their performance. Energy drinks shouldn't be confused with sports drinks, which are designed to maximise hydration. The caffeine content of energy drinks has the opposite effect — it dehydrates. At such levels, caffeine can increase diastolic blood pressure and heart rate (sometimes with palpitations) and provoke feelings of anxiety. It would also be enough to disqualify athletes from some formal competition.

And while caffeine is known to enhance performance in sport, at levels of about 200–300 mg, its diuretic effect could be a considerable disadvantage.

JUST FOR THE TASTE...

That's what the soft drink manufacturers have said about caffeine in soft drinks, so is it just good luck for them that it happens to be a habit-forming stimulant?

A recent study conducted with kids in the US found that a whopping 89% of Mountain Dew drinkers and 76% of Sunkist drinkers couldn't tell the difference between the versions with and without caffeine. So where's the 'taste'?

a cardiologist about heart palpitations and was advised to limit her caffeine intake to one cup of tea per day. The Coroner found that the high level of caffeine was associated with her developing an untreatable arrhythmia.

Energy drinks are very popular in the club scene, where people are often taking drugs like ecstacy; adding caffeine to the mix isn't a good idea. Also, dehydration can be a problem in this situation. Clubbers are better off drinking water than an energy drink whose caffeine will add to the dehydration.

AS WELL AS CAFFEINE...

Besides caffeine, these drinks are bolstered with vitamins and minerals as well as novel additives like herbal extracts. Are these ingredients effective? More importantly, are they safe?

- **B vitamins:** A number of the B group vitamins have a role in releasing energy from food in the body. There's no foundation to 'more is better' when it comes to vitamins, so the very high added levels won't help if you already get enough from your diet.

While most of the B vitamins aren't a problem — because they're water-soluble the body simply gets rid of excess in urine — there's concern about the amount of niacin (B_3) in some of these drinks. It would only take two cans of **RED BULL**, **V**, **PROFESSOR HEAD'S SMART DRINK Energy** and **Happy** as well as all the **RED EYE** drinks to exceed the upper limit the US has placed on niacin (35 mg/day) because of concerns with flushing (including burning, tingling, itching, redness).

- **Vitamin A:** This is probably added because it's an antioxidant (the disease-fighting vitamin that helps protect against cancer and heart disease) and so has good marketing potential.

However, excess vitamin A is stored in the body and can be dangerous at high levels. The amounts in some of these drinks could be too much for children if they drink more than one can — the US has an upper limit of 900 micrograms (µg) of vitamin A for a four- to eight-year-old. Two cans of **PROFESSOR HEAD'S SMART DRINK Brain Fuel**, **Defence** or **Happy** have 1000 µg.

Pregnant women should avoid taking extra vitamin A because of risk of birth defects.

Taurine: Taurine is an amino acid used by the body in a wide range of protective and metabolic activities. Why it's in energy drinks, though, is a bit of a mystery because the body can easily make its own supply. The role of taurine is still not fully understood. It's excreted by the body in times of stress, but there's no evidence taking extra taurine can somehow reduce stress. Claims that it has a 'detoxifying' role don't stand up to scientific scrutiny.

The level of taurine in some of these drinks is ridiculously high (1000 mg per can) but there's no evidence it's either harmful or safe at these high levels. New standards for these drinks could allow these high levels on this basis, but CHOICE thinks it's madness to allow an ingredient in a food at such high levels without adequate scientific studies about its safety and when there's no apparent reason for its inclusion.

Inositol: This is a sugar alcohol. Clinical trials indicate that it may help people with depression and panic or obsessive-compulsive disorders (at very high therapeutic doses of 12 grams a day — these drinks contain 5–50 mg per serve). But that's a long way from claims like "vitamin B_7 and inositol help calm and settle by occupying the receptor sites inhibiting cells from overfiring" (**PROFESSOR HEAD'S SMART DRINK Happy**).

While there aren't any long-term studies on the safety of inositol, history of use by regular drinkers of energy drinks (on two cans a day) indicates it's safe at that level (100 mg).

Glucuronolactone: This is a compound we make in our bodies in the breakdown of glucose. There doesn't seem to be a plausible explanation for what it might do in a drink or why **RED BULL** claims it has a "detoxifying" role, when this isn't supported scientifically.

Available studies don't provide any evidence of adverse effects, but the amount you might get from some of these drinks is many times what you'd normally get from foods.

Co-enzyme Q10: "Greatly assists in the transportation of oxygen in the blood stream" says **[I] IKON Sparkling Energy Drink,** and "credited with cell development and assisting cardiovascular function" according to **PROFESSOR HEAD'S SMART DRINK Defence**. These claims sail pretty close to the wind: health claims on labels aren't allowed at present, and we think these are borderline.

Co-enzyme Q10 may be useful to the medical profession when treating some forms of cardiovascular diseases, and it may also have a role in preventing heart disease. But whether a healthy person needs extra to "assist cardiac function", for example, is questionable, particularly from a soft drink.

HERBAL INGREDIENTS

Do they work?

A number of the drinks have herbal extracts added, supposedly for their "health-enhancing" properties, most commonly guarana, ginseng and ginkgo biloba.

While some herbs have a long and respected healing tradition, there are a number of factors to consider before taking them, including which ones to take, at what concentration and how they interact with other drugs or medications. With these drinks, the concentrations and amounts aren't listed, and the herbs really seem to be there purely for marketing purposes.

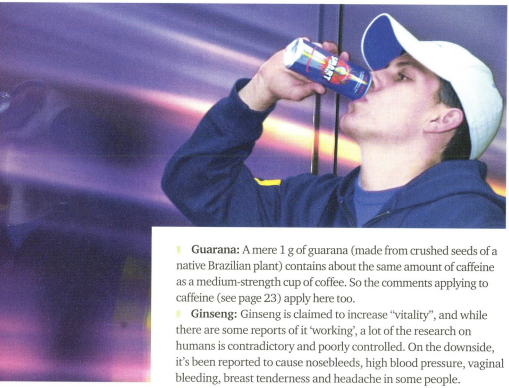
Are they safe?

Chances are, they're present at such low levels that they're of little benefit, and on the upside, possibly of little risk — but you don't know for sure.

Crossing the Tasman...

Energy drinks can't be made in Australia — there's no standard for them in our Food Standards Code, and they mostly exceed the Australian limit for caffeine allowed in cola-type drinks. So manufacturers and distributors simply import them from New Zealand. Under the provisions of the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement, they're allowed in provided they comply with New Zealand regulations. So we've got a proliferation of drinks on our retail shelves that don't meet our food regulations.

The manufacturer of ***RED BULL*** *has applied to the food regulator ANZFA to be allowed to manufacture the drink in Australia. ANZFA is considering the application, and from its assessment report it seems possible a new standard will be developed to accommodate these drinks (they'll be known as 'formulated caffeine beverages', not 'energy drinks'). Current formulations or labelling may have to be changed for drinks to meet the standard.*



Guarana: A mere 1 g of guarana (made from crushed seeds of a native Brazilian plant) contains about the same amount of caffeine as a medium-strength cup of coffee. So the comments applying to caffeine (see page 23) apply here too.

Ginseng: Ginseng is claimed to increase "vitality", and while there are some reports of it 'working', a lot of the research on humans is contradictory and poorly controlled. On the downside, it's been reported to cause nosebleeds, high blood pressure, vaginal bleeding, breast tenderness and headache in some people.

Ginkgo biloba: While some of the claims are a bit far-fetched — "support[s] brain function in the vital functions of cerebral blood flow, circulation and oxygenation" — there is some basis to them. Ginkgo is used by doctors in Germany for circulation problems and has been approved there for medically supervised treatment of dementia, and an Australian study (funded by Blackmores) found ginkgo improved cognitive function in younger people. However, this research hasn't been independently validated and is based only on standardised ginkgo extract (which is not necessarily what you'll be getting in an energy drink).

Ginkgo can have some side effects like stomach upset and headache. There've also been reports of bleeding in the eye and increased bleeding after surgery.

St John's Wort: This is known as a calmative herb and is used to treat depression. Whether it can live up to claims like "the ultimate high" is another matter.

However, one thing it *can* do is reduce the effectiveness of a number of medications, including those for depression, HIV, blood clots and epilepsy. Its side effects include agitation when mixed with migraine tablets or anti-depressants.

CHOICE VERDICT

If energy drinks have any effect it's largely due to their caffeine content. The other ingredients seem to be mostly window dressing for marketing purposes rather than included for any sound scientific reason. Particularly if there's no or inadequate scientific research on an ingredient's safety and effects, CHOICE doesn't think a manufacturer should be able to include it — especially at high levels and without warning labels.

Consumers — especially those buying for kids and teenagers — should be given adequate and balanced information about the drinks' ingredients on the labels, so they can make informed decisions.

Caffeine content of some food and drinks

Compare these with the caffeine content of the energy drinks (right).

Product	Caffeine (mg)
COFFEE	
Instant, weak, 1 level tsp	45
Instant, strong, 1 heaped tsp	90
Instant decaf	2
Brewed, percolator, 200 mL	100
Drip method, 200 mL	140
Espresso (short black), 100 mL	80
Cappuccino	80
TEA	
Bag / brewed, weak, 200 mL	20
Bag / brewed, strong, 200 mL	70
Decaf tea	1
Herbal tea	0
SOFT DRINKS	
Coke, 375 mL	50
Pepsi, 375 mL	38
CHOCOLATE	
Dark, 50 g (10 squares)	33
Milk, 50 g (10 squares)	12
Hot drink, 200 mL	6

IS IT A FOOD? IS IT A DRUG? IS IT A ...

These drinks contain ingredients found in dietary supplements and herbs in traditional herbal medicines. Some of them recommend a daily 'dose'. They make claims promising health benefits beyond their nutritional value. Their promos make them sound much like a drug or complementary medicine, yet they're freely available on our supermarket shelves without having to prove they work or that they're safe. And most of them don't even meet Australian regulations (see *Crossing the Tasman*, page 25, for how they manage this).

The big problem is that the food regulator ANZFA allows naturally occurring caffeine in the form of coffee, tea or guarana, and herbs like ginseng and ginkgo biloba to be added to food and drinks. They're approved

What's in the drinks?

Brand and name (in order of highest to lowest caffeine content)	Caffeine (mg / serve*)	Caffeine	Guarana	Amino acids	Vitamin A	B vitamins	Inositol	Glucuronolactone	Coenzyme-Q10	Herbal ingredients	Daily 'dosage' (recommended maximum on label)
BLACK STALLION Stimulation Dietary Supplement Drink	80	✓	✓	✓ **(A)**		✓	✓	✓			3 cans
DARK DOG Energy	80	✓	✓	✓ **(A)**		✓					5 cans
PROFESSOR HEAD'S SMART DRINK Brain Fuel	80	✓	✓	✓ **(B)**	✓	✓	✓			✓	1-5 cans
PROFESSOR HEAD'S SMART DRINK Energy Drink	80	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	1-5 cans
RED BULL Energy Drink	80	✓		✓ **(A)**		✓	✓	✓			5 cans
V Dietary Supplement Drink with Guarana and B vitamins	80	✓	✓	✓ **(A)**		✓	✓	✓			5 cans **(G)**
RED EYE Platinum with Energy Ingredients	65		✓	✓		✓				✓	In moderation
RED EYE Gold with Guarana	50		✓	✓ **(A)**		✓					In moderation
DIRTY DOG Cactus Lemonade with Guarana and Extra Caffeine	40	✓	✓								In moderation
DIRTY DOG Cola with Guarana and Extra Caffeine	40	✓	✓								In moderation
DIRTY DOG Sour Puss Lemon Lime and Bitters	40	✓	✓								In moderation
[I] IKON Sparkling Energy Drink	40	✓	✓	✓ **(A)**	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	2-3 cans
LIPOVITAN Energy & Well Being	40	✓		✓ **(A)**		✓				✓ **(D)**	5 cans
LIFT PLUS	35	✓	✓			✓				✓ **(D)**	5 cans
RED EYE Extreme Ginkgo & Ginseng	35		✓	✓		✓				✓	In moderation
RED EYE Classic	30		✓	✓ **(A)**		✓					In moderation
Non-caffeinated 'functional' drinks											
[I] IKON Sparkling Berry Drink	0			✓ **(C)**	✓	✓	✓			✓ **(E)**	2-3 cans
PROFESSOR HEAD'S SMART DRINK Defence	0			✓ **(B)**	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓ **(F)**	1-5 cans
PROFESSOR HEAD'S SMART DRINK Happy	0			✓ **(B)**	✓	✓	✓			✓ **(E)**	1 - 5 cans

* *A serve is a 250 mL can or bottle, except for Red Eye at 330 mL.*

(A) *Taurine only.*

(B) *Not taurine.*

(C) *L-tyrosine only.*

(D) *Ginseng only.*

(E) *Including St John's Wort.*

(F) *A large range: echinacea, red clover, suma, ginkgo biloba, green tea, bilberry, grape seed, hawthorn.*

(G) *States that this amount "contains your maximum daily dose of B3 (niacin)".*

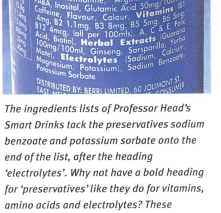
foods under the current law, just like pepper, basil or other culinary herbs and plant extracts.

The difference is that these ingredients aren't being added for flavour, but for their claimed extra medicinal or beneficial properties. CHOICE thinks if manufacturers make products like these energy drinks that are basically a sugary vehicle for herbs, vitamins and amino acids, they should be regulated as complementary medicines, not foods.

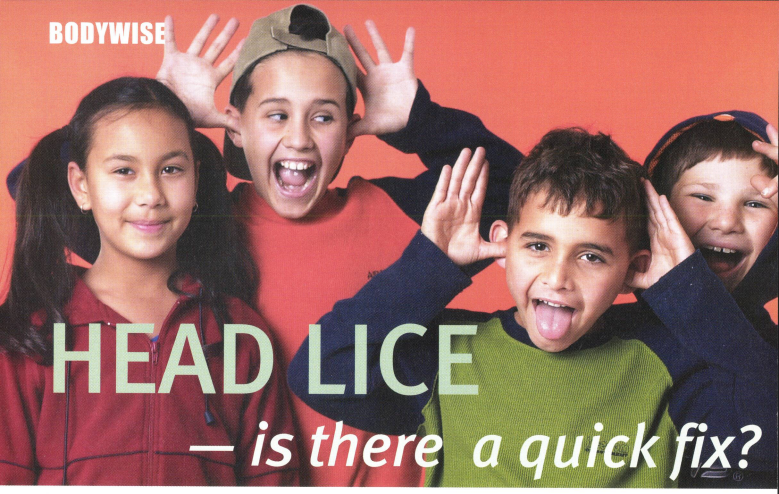
Standard warning labels and disclosure of ingredients are also needed. It may not look like it on the shelves, where all the drinks are grouped together, but they're regulated by different standards, each requiring different labelling and information. ANZFA says it's up to manufacturers to decide which rules apply to their various products, allowing industry to pick and choose the most suitable (usually the less rigorous) for their needs. This means inconsistency and less information for consumers.

ANZFA is developing a standard for energy drinks containing added caffeine (not naturally occurring like in guarana) that'll require levels to be stated on the label, along with a clear warning. This is inadequate, as it won't apply to all energy drinks and it still doesn't require any evidence regarding the efficacy of the other ingredients used to sell the products. NZ imports will still be allowed to be sold, as will energy drinks claiming that they're 'sports foods', like the **RED EYE** drinks.

The bottom line is that these products aren't foods, but don't require any of the restrictions on claims that complementary medicines do — and ANZFA's new rules won't address these problems.



The ingredients lists of Professor Head's Smart Drinks tack the preservatives sodium benzoate and potassium sorbate onto the end of the list, after the heading 'electrolytes'. Why not have a bold heading for 'preservatives' like they do for vitamins, amino acids and electrolytes? These preservatives are in a number of the drinks; sodium benzoate can be a problem for asthmatics.



HEAD LICE — is there a quick fix?

No. And don't rely on claims made by treatment products either.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Use a louse comb** *and conditioner to detect lice, and deal with heavy infestations with an insecticidal treatment combined with combing.*
- **Misusing products** *could contribute to lice resistance and adverse reactions — so use them only as directed.*
- **No treatment kills 100%** *of the eggs on contact, so don't believe 'one application only' claims.*
- **Most herbal treatments,** *unlike insecticidal products, haven't been clinically tested or independently assessed before being released on the market.*

If you think there are more head lice infestations now than ever, you might be right.

In 1985, when we last reported on head lice treatments, the rate of infestation was about 0.5%. Now experts think up to 20% of primary school children in Queensland, for example, could be infested at any given time and, according to a recent study, the proportion of children affected at one school in Brisbane was up to 70% in some classes.

At the same time there's been an explosion of treatments, some with a barely credible range of claims.

In Australia some head lice treatments are regulated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA); others are unregulated but may be sold in the state they're produced in under state trading legislation.

So which ones should you buy? Your best bet is products that have been regulated by the TGA, but unfortunately there are two categories of these: registered (with an 'R' number on the label) and listed (with an 'L' number).

- **Registered** products may contain pesticides, and must provide the TGA with clinical evidence of their safety and effectiveness before they can be sold.
- **Listed** products contain multiple ingredients such as essential oils and herbal extracts in varying quantities and combinations. While they're allowed to claim they treat, cure or manage head lice without having to provide clinical evidence or independent assessment, prior to sale they must have some evidence to support their claims. The evidence behind the herbal products we bought ranged from references to the product's traditional use, consumer testimonials, uncontrolled consumer tests and chemical data safety checks to laboratory product safety and efficacy trials, and small clinical and large field trials comparing them with insecticidal treatments.

In other words, you should be able to trust **registered** treatments because they're evaluated by the TGA for safety, efficacy and quality, while the clinical effectiveness and safety of listed products aren't. However, we've found some examples of both types that make dubious claims.

SO WHY IS THERE NO QUICK FIX?

There's no quick fix because even the registered products, often despite their claims, are very unlikely to work with just one application. In addition, in certain areas, the lice may have developed a resistance to certain insecticides.

DETECTING LICE

A recent study by Queensland Health found that wet combing — combing with thick white conditioner and a louse comb — is a good technique for detecting eggs and lice and even treating regular light infestations.

Apply lots of thick white conditioner to dry hair, making sure you use enough to reach the ends. Comb the conditioner through with a normal comb, section the hair into four parts, then systematically start combing with a louse comb, regularly wiping it on a tissue to check for lice and eggs. The conditioner will stun the little suckers for up to 20 minutes and make combing easier. If eggs are viable they'll pop when you squeeze them.

Some parents use this technique on a weekly basis to detect and get rid of lice before they can become rampant. This can reduce the need to resort to chemical treatments, but it's time-consuming, so plonking younger kids in front of a video while you do it might be useful. Teaching older kids how to do it themselves will not only save you time but help them learn about head lice.

Many treatments provide a comb, but you'll probably still need to experiment to find the best type for your child's hair. There are electronic combs on the market that claim to detect and zap lice, but experts say there's no evidence that they work any better than a standard louse comb — and at $58 they're expensive.

If your child has live head lice, most Australian states require them to have started treatment to be allowed at school.

THE TREATMENTS

There are two groups of chemical treatment, based on their active ingredients:

- **Insecticides:** maldison (malathion), pyrethrins (combined with piperonyl butoxide) and synthetic pyrethroids such as permethrin and bioallethrin.
- **Herbal:** various combinations of essential oils and herbal extracts.

Their effectiveness depends not only on the active ingredient but on how you use the treatment and whether head lice in your local area have developed a resistance to it.

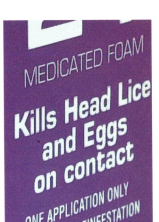
It also varies according to the percentage and quality of the active ingredient in the formula and what type of base it's carried in. Lotions with an alcohol base have longer contact times and are more effective than shampoos, but they're harder to use. Foams, mousses and rinses are less effective but easier to use.

Insecticidal treatments

If your child is heavily infested, it's best to try an insecticide-based product first — you need something that works and there's very little clinical evidence to show that most herbal products are an effective first line of treatment. Some experts suggest starting with a permethrin or pyrethrin-based product — while not normally as effective as maldison, less is absorbed through the skin.

Although there's been reported resistance to insecticidal ingredients, this doesn't necessarily mean the products won't work in your area.

When maldison and permethrin were first marketed in the 1970s they had good kill rates. But now there's anecdotal evidence of resistance to it in parts of



Head lice treatments won't kill 100% of eggs first time round — you need at least one more application to mop up any that have hatched since the first treatment.

CHOOSING TREATMENTS BY THEIR ACTIVE INGREDIENTS

Active ingredient	TGA category	Brands we reviewed
Maldison	R	KP24, HL7, LiceRid
Permethrin	R	Quellada, Pyrifoam, Orange Medic Headlice Treatment
Bioallethrin, piperonyl butoxide and pyrethrins	R	Paralice aerosol spray, Pyrenel, Banlice
Herbal (active ingredients include combinations of essential oils and herbal extracts, and combinations differ from product to product)	L	LiceBlaster, Neutralice, Lice Attack, Lysout Gel, Eucanol, Meditree Tea Tree Lice Foam, Electric Blue Natural Headlice Cream, Quit Nits, Lice Scents To Kill*, Exit Lice, Wild Child Head Lice Treatment, Gentle Remedies Lice

**Contains 1% sassafras, which may contain carcinogens. The TGA says it's considered safe in topical treatments providing the concentration doesn't exceed 1%.*

Maldison (malathion) is an organophosphate that has the potential to cause nerve problems. However, no published research shows it's harmful as a topical treatment, though experts warn that it shouldn't be used regularly or over a long period of time. Side effects can include nausea, headaches, dizziness and shortness of breath.

Permethrin and bioallethrin may cause skin irritation, while other pyrethrins could affect people with allergies and cause side effects such as tingling, dermatitis, shortness of breath and wheezing. Piperonyl butoxide, which is used in combination with pyrethrin, may cause some skin or eye irritation.

Some herbal ingredients, such as tea tree, geranium and eucalyptus, can cause irritation if you have sensitive skin.

HEAD LICE FACTS

- *Head lice are small (2–3 mm) blood-sucking parasites that breed all year round.*
- *They live in the hair and come down to the scalp to feed — so you need to check and treat all the hair, not just the scalp.*
- *They live for up to 40 days.*
- *Experts estimate a female head louse lays around five eggs a day.*
- *The eggs are laid close to the scalp and are 'cemented' to the hair shaft.*
- *Eggs hatch seven to 10 days after they're laid and are called nymphs until they develop into full adults 10 days later.*
- *Head lice are wingless and don't jump, but they can crawl and swing through the hair very quickly.*
- *Once an untreated head louse leaves its host, it has about six to 24 hours to find a new host or it'll die. Most head lice that fall off are about to die.*

Tasmania and Queensland, and isolated cases have shown resistance to all three insecticidal ingredients. There's currently very little information about which active ingredient or complete product works best in what area. You might have to try a couple of treatments with different active ingredients to find the one that works best for you.

Herbal treatments

Though some herbal ingredients have a long history of use against head lice, there's very little clinical research about the efficacy or resistance potential of either individual herbal ingredients or complete formulations.

Essential oils, such as tea tree, lavender and eucalyptus, contain volatile compounds that used to form the basis of some insecticide lotions. Some experts think these compounds may have some potential, but this doesn't guarantee their success in a formulation.

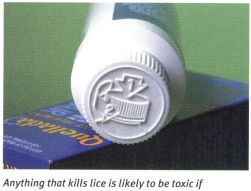
While some listed products such as **NEUTRALICE** have been laboratory-tested against maldison and permethrin-based products and for skin sensitivity, very few products have been tested in clinical field trials under controlled conditions.

The only herbal product we could find that's been clinically field-tested against maldison or permethrin products is **LICEBLASTER**, a combination of herbal extracts and tea tree oil. When used with a louse comb the alcohol-based product was more effective at treating head lice in North Queensland than **KP24** maldison-based foam (not lotion) and **PYRIFOAM** (a permethrin foam-based product). There are no details about how effective it is compared with maldison or permethrin alcohol-based lotions.

SAFETY

No matter whether it's registered or listed with the TGA, no insecticidal or herbal product can legally claim to be safe.

- Herbal treatments can be toxic if swallowed, so treat them as you would any other insecticide and keep them out of the reach of children.
- All the products can cause skin irritation, especially if the skin is sensitive or broken; and eye irritation, so use a visor or cover the eyes with a cloth or towel. Use them in a well ventilated area and apply them with gloves.
- Any product containing alcohol/ethanol or that's packaged as an aerosol is highly flammable — so don't use it near a naked flame.
- Most side effects of head lice products go unreported, but we'd advise you to report adverse reactions to any type of TGA registered or listed product to your pharmacist or GP, who'll send the information on to the Adverse Drugs Reaction Committee.
- Don't use dangerous substances like kerosene.
- Don't spray your kids' hats or clothes with insect repellent (or your kids!).



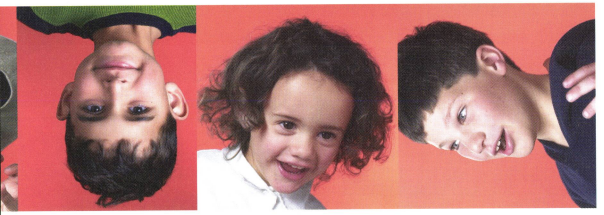
Anything that kills lice is likely to be toxic if swallowed. Only two insecticidal products (KP24 and Quellada) and no herbal products we bought had a tamper-resistant cap. While about half had warnings not to swallow or said 'for external use only', only one product gave the contact number for Poisons Information on 13 11 26.

CHANGES TO COME?

The Thereapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) is reviewing all head lice treatments on the market and considering whether or not they should be registered and require scientific evidence, including clinical field studies, to support their claims. CHOICE thinks they should be — after all, around $20 is a lot to pay for a treatment that hasn't been clinically proven to work.

Under the Therapeutic Goods Advertising Code, head lice products that were regulated by the TGA before April 2000 can make claims such as "kills head lice and their eggs on contact", "it really works", "effectively kills head lice", "lethal on lice" as long as they can be backed up by evidence. As from April last year no new *listed* products can make these claims and the old ones have to stop making them by April 2004. (This is also the case with listed products that claim to prevent reinfestation.) But *registered* products can still claim to kill lice and eggs with one application.

CHOICE would question whether any product should be able to make a claim of immediate and complete effectiveness when it's very unlikely on current evidence that they provide it.



WANT MORE INFO?

For more information about head lice treatment and links to other resources visit our website, www.choice.com.au, and type 'head lice treatments' in the search box.

HOW TO USE THE TREATMENTS

The Queensland study found that some parents applied treatments every time they saw live lice, even if they'd treated their child the day before. While you might be tempted to dump another treatment on your child's head the next day if it didn't seem to work or to try to use treatments to repel lice — don't. Treatments should be used only as instructed, otherwise you increase the risk of treatment failure, insect resistance and adverse reactions.

Apply enough product to fully coat the hair to the ends — alcoholic lotions are harder to apply and it can be easy to think you've put enough on when you haven't. Experts recommend you apply about 30 mL for children with fine hair and 40 mL on thick hair, but you may need as much as 100–200 mL for longer hair. Comb with a louse comb, regularly wiping it on a tissue to check for lice or eggs.

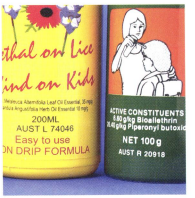
If the treatment's effective the lice won't move after 20 minutes. If there are any still moving they're probably resistant to the treatment's active ingredient. If so, wash the hair and use another treatment with a different active ingredient.

No product can guarantee to kill 100% of the eggs in one go, so viable eggs can hatch later. Experts advise combing the hair with conditioner and a louse comb every third day and treating it again after seven days if necessary. If there are no live lice after 14 days this infestation's cured. If there are some, apply a third treatment and continue until you don't find any.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

- Check all other members of the family with the conditioner and louse comb technique.
- Treat everyone in the family who has live lice and viable eggs.
- Use separate brushes and combs and soak them in hot water (60°C) for 30 seconds after use. You may need to heat the water as not all tap water is this hot. There's no need to soak brushes and combs in a treatment solution.
- It's easier to comb and detect lice in short hair, but having short hair won't guarantee your kids'll be lice-free. To achieve this their hair would have to be no more than 2 mm long. Try tying back longer hair to reduce hair contact with others.
- Try a co-operative (rather than embarrassed) approach: you won't be the only one with the problem. Contact the parents of your child's immediate friends and ask them to check their children at the same time as you do yours. Experts say synchronising treatment with your child's direct contact group gives you the best chance of stopping reinfection.
- There's no need to blitz the house as there's no evidence that head lice can be transmitted by lying on the floor, sharing hats and so on. Just wash clothes and bedding in hot water and, if possible, dry them on 'high' in a clothes dryer. ■

Products that have been regulated by the TGA have an AUST R or AUST L number on the label.



NOT CHEAP!

Head lice treatments don't come cheap. We bought over $350 worth of products when researching this artice: on average the insecticidal treatments were cheaper than the herbals by about $4. The most expensive insecticidal treatment cost $14.95 and the most expensive herbal, an essential oil-based treatment, $19.99. That's quite a difference when you consider that the herbal treatment has no clinical trial information about how effective it is.

But the price difference doesn't stop there. We did a small price survey across 16 Sydney supermarkets, pharmacies and health food shops and found the products could cost up to $5 more depending on where you bought them.

Our advice? If you decide to use chemical head lice treatments, try an insecticide-based one first and, if possible, shop around for the best price.

The BIG CHILL

PHOTOS: RHONDA THWAITE

They'll all deliver the ice and keep the chook safely frozen: the rest is your choice.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Your basic choices** *are upright vs chest freezers, and frost-free vs manual defrost. Find out the pros and cons.*

WHAT TO BUY

Chest

FISHER & PAYKEL H160	$479
KELVINATOR OPAL H150F	$459

Upright

FISHER & PAYKEL N308	$1129

The two chest models are equally good, and the **FISHER & PAYKEL N308** is the best of the uprights tested.

You've decided you want a freezer and have floor space available for it (in the kitchen, garage, shed or wherever) of around 60 x 70 cm. This test is of models that will fit into that sort of area (see *What's on test?*, right, for details). Your next decision will be whether to buy a chest or an upright model.

UPRIGHT VS CHEST

- **Uprights** generally hold more food than a chest freezer with a similar footprint. The downside is that because they're bigger they'll cost more to run. (We found a couple of smaller 120-150 L uprights in our market survey, but around 300 L is the most popular size.)
- **Uprights** open like a normal fridge and have drawers/baskets or shelves for storage, which

PROFILES All the tested mo

FISHER & PAYKEL H160

Price: $479
Type: Chest; manual defrost.

GOOD POINTS

- Scored well for energy efficiency and cool-down time (see notes 2 to 5, page 35).
- The temperature throughout is quite uniform and there are only small temperature fluctuations as the compressor stops and starts. There's a good range of temperatures, and it handles changes in ambient temperature well.
- Fairly easy to clean.
- Has a lift-out top basket that makes food in it easier to access; however, there's not much space beside it to reach to the bottom of the freezer, so you'd probably need to take it out first. For that reason, don't load it up with heavy stuff.

BAD POINTS

- Being a chest freezer makes it pretty hard to organise and access the food.
- The temperature control could be difficult to get to if the freezer is next to a cupboard, for example: they're on the side near the back. They're also not very clear.

profiled in rank order, from left to right. Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in May 2001. Anything lower is a bargain.

KELVINATOR OPAL H150F

Price: $459

Type: Chest; manual defrost.

GOOD POINTS

- Energy-efficient, with a very good cool-down score — the best in this test.
- There are only small temperature fluctuations as the compressor stops and starts, and a good range of temperatures.
- Fairly easy to clean, with a tool supplied so you don't have to lean right into the freezer to operate the drain when you're defrosting it.

BAD POINTS

- Being a chest freezer makes it pretty hard to organise and access the food.
- There's some variation in temperature uniformity throughout the compartment.
- The temperature control could be difficult to get to if the freezer is next to a cupboard, for example: it's on the side.

FISHER & PAYKEL N308

Price: $1129

Type: Upright with drawers; frost-free.

GOOD POINTS

- The temperature throughout is quite uniform.
- Very easy to use; the drawers slide easily and give very easy access to the food, though their fronts are opaque so you'd probably want to label them to help find things.

BAD POINTS

- The temperature control is at the back, making it difficult to adjust, and could be confusing. And you may need to reset it when the surrounding temperature changes from very hot to very cold or vice versa, as this freezer reacts to ambient changes.

KELVINATOR OPAL FN300F

Price: $949

Type: Upright with shelves; frost-free.

GOOD POINTS

- The temperature throughout is quite uniform, and there's a good range of temperatures.
- Good cool-down score.

BAD POINTS

- The shelves aren't height-adjustable and have fairly small lips to stop food falling off. If you're tempted to slide a shelf forward for better access, food up against the rear wall is likely to fall. And you can't get all the shelves out if the freezer is next to a wall, say, so the door only opens to 90°.
- The temperature control is at the back, making it difficult to adjust, and could be confusing. And you may need to reset it when the surrounding temperature changes from very hot to very cold or vice versa, as this freezer reacts to ambient changes.
- The coil is exposed on the outside back, which makes the freezer harder to clean.

WESTINGHOUSE FREESTYLE FJ303Q

Price: $1129

Type: Upright with shelves; frost-free.

GOOD POINTS

- The temperature throughout is quite uniform.
- The temperature control is reasonably accessible (at the front at floor level) but has to be adjusted with a screwdriver or coin.

BAD POINTS

- Relatively slow cool-down time.
- The shelves aren't height-adjustable and have fairly small lips to stop food falling off. If you're tempted to slide a shelf forward for better access, food up against the rear wall is likely to fall. And you can't get all the shelves out if the freezer is next to a wall, say, so the door only opens to 90°.

WHAT'S ON TEST?

Two small (150-200 L) chest freezers and three larger (around 300 L) uprights. Why the different sizes? Because both types will fit into around the same amount of floor space, so they're what you'd be looking at if you had a space around 55-65 cm wide x 65-70 cm deep. While chest freezers are a lot lower than uprights, you still need space above them to open the lid: probably around 1.5 m total height for both uprights and chests in this test.

The uprights tested are frost-free, the chest models manual defrost, which seems to reflect the norm at this smaller end of the freezer market, though our market survey found a few manual-defrost upright freezers too.

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)	2 Energy efficiency score (%)	3 Temperature performance score (%)	4 Cool-down score (%)	5 Warm-up score (%)	6 Ease of use score (%)	Claimed / measured energy use (kWh / year)	7 10-y running costs
FISHER & PAYKEL H160	75	83	88	74	53	54	361 / 399	499
KELVINATOR Opal H150F	73	84	77	85	52	55	387 / 380	475
FISHER & PAYKEL N308	69	62	73	67	60	75	696 / 728	910
KELVINATOR Opal FN300F	64	56	71	70	53	63	867 / 779	974
WESTINGHOUSE Freestyle FJ303Q	60	57	70	42	58	66	830 / 765	956

let you organise and access food very easily. Ideally they'd slide in and out smoothly without falling out or letting any of the food fall out. A couple of the models in this test, though, have shelves that don't seem intended to be moved; if you do move them they only have a small lip to prevent food falling off. One disadvantage of drawers or baskets is that you lose some storage space to accommodate them — see 'claimed gross/measured usable volume' in the table: the **FISHER & PAYKEL N308** is a case in point.

- With a **chest** freezer you have to lean in and down to get to the food — no good at all for anyone with a bad back and, once there's more than one layer to sort through, likely to be frustrating even for a well organised householder who labels everything they put in. Some models have a lift-out top basket to help, others a vertical divider.
- Most **uprights** on the market are frost-free, meaning you won't need to defrost them. The frost-free process removes moisture from the air in the freezer, so you'll need to wrap all your food well to stop it drying out (including ice, which will simply disappear if it isn't covered). The chest models tested are manual defrost (as are most of those we found on the market in this test range); they'll become less energy-efficient if you don't defrost them regularly.
- The **chest** models in this test rated better in many of the technical performance tests, especially for having less temperature fluctuation (which should help maintain the quality of your frozen food).
- When you open an upright freezer cold air can flow out because it falls; this doesn't happen in a **chest** freezer.
- The **chest** freezers in this test are a lot cheaper to buy than the upright models, as well as to run.

The bottom line? For convenience and storage space, go for an upright. For a cheaper price and perhaps better performance, choose a chest. ■

What to look for

Other than frost-free vs manual defrost, it's worth checking the following aspects when you're shopping around.

- **Shelves or drawers:** With shelves you can open the door and see what's there or just toss in a bag of peas. But check how movable they are, and whether they have lips to stop food falling out at the front, sides and back when you do move them.

  Sliding drawers or baskets may take up more potential storage space than shelves, but they make it easier to access food: check they slide smoothly. Some have opaque fronts, so you'd probably need to label them to make finding things easier. Drawers with a solid front also make the storage area more enclosed, so less cold air escapes when you open the door.
- **Controls:** Check where they're located and if they're easy to understand and adjust. Some need a coin or small screwdriver to change the setting.

	SPECIFICATIONS						
Noise evel (dB)	Freezer type	Measured dimensions (H x W x D, cm)*	Claimed gross / measured usable volume (L)	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)**
0	Chest	90 x 61 x 66	164 / 151	2 **(A)**	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	479
0	Chest	91 x 56 x 66	150 / 141	1 **(B)**	Australia	Electrolux	459
2	Upright	144 x 65 x 70	304 / 184	2 **(A)**	NZ	Fisher & Paykel	1129
1	Upright	156 x 59 x 67	300 / 240	1 **(B)**	Australia	Electrolux	949
0	Upright	160 x 61 x 66	300 / 235	1 **(B)**	Australia	Electrolux	1129

* *Measured dimensions include hinges and any protrusions at the back such as the compressor, rounded to the next centimetre.*

** *Prices are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in May 2001.*

(A) *Repair or replace; five years repair or replace on sealed refrigeration system and rust.*

(B) *Repair or replace (extended to two years if you register); five years repair or replace on sealed refrigeration system and rust.*

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre assessed these freezers for the following physical limitations:

- **In a wheelchair:** The **WESTINGHOUSE** is the best — the door opens easily, the shelves move fairly freely (though things may fall off the back when you move them) and it's simple to maintain (frost-free). The **KELVINATOR FN300F** is similar, though its door handle is high.
- **Upper limb dysfunction:** The frost-free **FISHER & PAYKEL N308** upright is the best for general ease of use — the drawers slide easily — though the door is a little difficult to open if you have weak hands or wrists.
- **Back pain:** Any of the three uprights would be suitable.
- **Vision impairment:** None of the models in this test is great. The **FISHER & PAYKEL N308** upright is the best of them but still has no internal light and poor controls.

SIMILAR MODELS

The **WESTINGHOUSE FD153S** (RRP $449) is technically similar to the **KELVINATOR Opal H150F** chest freezer; so is the **WESTINGHOUSE FD152ES** (RRP $449), which is exclusive to Betta stores. However, they have a top basket instead of a vertical divider.

1 Overall score

This score includes:
Energy efficiency: 24%.
Temperature performance: 32%.
Cool-down test: 16%.
Warm-up test: 8%.
Ease of use: 20%.

2 Energy efficiency score

This test checks energy use and comparative energy efficiency of the models.

3 Temperature performance score

- Is the temperature appropriate when the control is set to the mid or recommended setting?
- How well does the freezer cope with changes in outside temperature?
- Temperature uniformity within the freezer compartment (are there warm or cold spots?).
- Temperature fluctuations during normal running.
- Is there a useful range of temperatures?

4 Cool-down test score

Models are tested to see how long they take to cool the air in an empty freezer from switch-on to –13°C in a very warm ambient temperature. It's a purely comparative rating, essentially showing which freezers have more 'oomph'; the times taken don't relate to real-life food cool-down times, so we've just given the score.

5 Warm-up test score

This is a test of the freezer's insulation, giving an idea of how it would perform in a power failure. They're switched off in an ambient temperature of 32°C; the test starts when the freezer temperature is –15°C and ends when it's –5°C. The longer this takes, the better. Again, it's a comparative test and the actual times will be longer with food in the freezer, so we've only printed the score.

6 Ease of use score

This score includes:
Storage, access and general versatility: 60%.
Cleaning: 30%.
Controls: 10%.

7 10-year running costs

The running cost is calculated from the energy used over 10 years, at a rate of 12.5 cents per kilowatt hour. The upright freezers in this test are bigger than the chest models, which would largely account for their higher running costs.

8 Noise level

They're all moderately quiet, though the **KELVINATOR** and **WESTINGHOUSE** uprights would be slightly more noticeable.

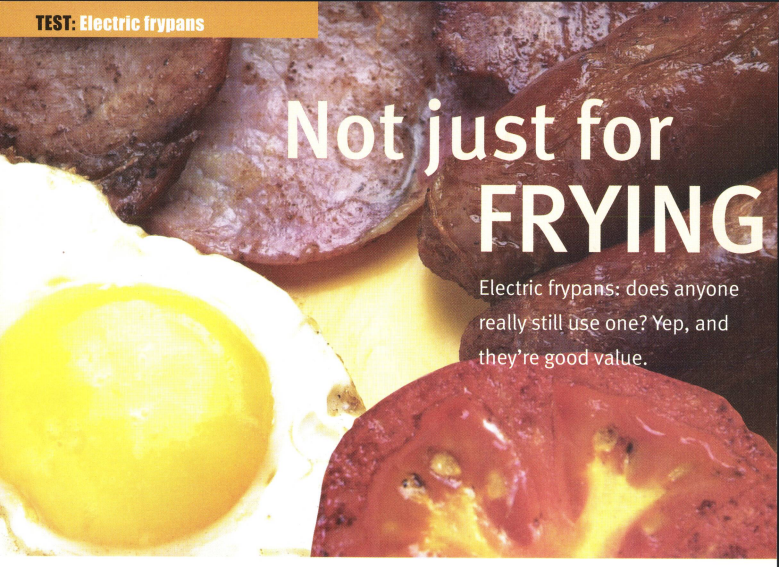
Getting the right temperature

A freezer should be –18°C or below. Slightly warmer (no higher than –15°C) can still be OK and it'll make ice cream more scoopable, but food quality and storage times are likely to be affected.

Large temperature fluctuations can compromise food quality. One sign of this is if your ice cream develops crystals on the top — that means it's thawed a bit and refrozen. This will affect its texture and taste, and may well affect the quality of other foods too. We've noted in the profiles (pages 32–33) the models with the least fluctuation; it's not something you can work out for yourself when you're buying.

A freezer needs to be able to cope with extreme temperatures because it's often kept outside the house. Freezers in Australia are designed to cope with ambient temperatures ranging from 10°C to 43°C. However, if your freezer is in a garage or shed, temperatures can easily get lower or higher than this, making it difficult to maintain the set internal temperature. It's best to use a thermometer to check, especially when the outside temperature changes significantly.

Ideally, you shouldn't load a freezer with food that's at room temperature; cool it first so it doesn't affect the food already in the freezer.



Not just for FRYING

Electric frypans: does anyone really still use one? Yep, and they're good value.

IN A NUTSHELL

Electric frypans *are an old appliance made good: they're versatile, convenient and you'll be surprised how many models are in the shops. Don't laugh at your grandma for using one any more!*

WHAT'S ON TEST?

We tested nine models for cooking performance, energy efficiency, surface durability and ease of use. We chose models with a base about 30 cm in diameter, and a deep pan where a brand had one available. The models are all dishwasher-safe to some degree, and seven have non-stick coatings.

Electric frypans are useful when you're cooking up a storm — say at Christmas when the oven is crammed with turkey but the potatoes still need to be done. And apart from that, some people still just like using one.

They allow you to fry, poach, boil, steam, bake and roast a variety of food types, including casseroles, chicken, fish, steak, sausages, sauces, soups, rice, pasta, nuts, eggs, pancakes, popcorn, scones, damper and sponge cake; even baked custard.

They're convenient too, for example if you need to pre-fry meat or onions; and they're quicker to warm up and use less energy than an oven because they don't have to heat as much air.

When food is cooked with the lid on and the steam vent closed, the frypan acts like steamer. Food should cook thoroughly; meat will be tender and larger items like chickens will be more likely to cook right through, without burning on the outside. However, the skin won't be quite as crispy as in an oven. Crispness might be improved a bit by opening the steam vent for the last half-hour or so of cooking.

Of the two models that don't have a non-stick coating (the **SUNBEAM FP8600** with stainless steel and **FP4500** with polished aluminium), food that stuck was easier to clean off the steel surface. All the non-stick surfaces did their job well.

The accuracy of the thermostat will be reflected in the cooking, though you can generally learn to adjust for it. For example, the thermostats on the **KAMBROOK** and the two **MISTRALs** didn't give operating temperatures that corresponded well with the temperature settings — they were a fair bit lower. This means you'd either learn to turn them up higher to start with, or they'd take longer to cook items. We noticed it when we cooked a chicken and potatoes, but could still get an acceptable end result by fiddling with the cooking time and temperature control. Only the **TEFAL** and **SUNBEAM FP8600** achieved really accurate temperatures; the **BREVILLE** overshot, while the other models reached lower temperatures than those set.

WHAT TO BUY

SUNBEAM Ellise Stainless FP8600		$190
BREVILLE TF150		$150
MISTRAL MEF41	TEST BUY	$70
SUNBEAM Ellise Essential FP7600		$145

PROFILES

Models in the *What to buy list* are profiled in rank order from left to right. Prices shown are recommended retail, as supplied by the manufacturers in June 2001. See the table on page 38 for features the models have.

SUNBEAM ELLISE STAINLESS FP8600

Price: $190

GOOD POINTS

- Good at cooking: chicken was roasted rather than steamed (though was judged a little dry); potatoes browned, soft but just crisp.
- Excellent heat distribution.
- Fully dishwasher-safe.
- Stainless steel interior surface has a 25-year warranty.
- Large capacity.
- Cool-touch handles that did stay cool enough to touch.
- Rubber foot pads for sure grip.

PROVIDED, CONSUMERS NZ

BAD POINTS

- The steam vent is permanently open, so it's a bit less versatile.
- Food sticks a little, but is easy to clean off.

BREVILLE TF150

Price: $150

GOOD POINTS

- Good at cooking: chicken was juicy (though mainly steamed); potatoes browned, firm and crisp.
- Good heat distribution.
- Excellent durability of non-stick surface.
- The easiest in the test to use — the detachable base makes it easier to clean, it's fully dishwasher-safe and has large, clearly marked controls.
- Plastic spatula supplied.
- Cool-touch handles that did stay cool enough to touch.
- Tilt leg allows juices and fats to be drained to one side while cooking.

BAD POINTS

- No steam vent.

MISTRAL MEF41

Price: $70 TEST BUY

GOOD POINTS

- Good at cooking: chicken was juicy (though mainly steamed); potatoes browned and firm.
- Good heat distribution.
- Excellent durability of non-stick surface.
- Fully dishwasher-safe.
- Light in weight.
- Adjustable steam vent.
- Two-year warranty.

BAD POINTS

- Thermostat settings were well above the actual temperatures generated on the cooking surface, so while cooking the chicken we needed to turn it up by approximately 20°C for good results.
- Cleaning is awkward as the base isn't detachable.

VAUGHN MARSHALL

SUNBEAM ELLISE ESSENTIAL FP7600

Price: $145

GOOD POINTS

- Very good at cooking: chicken was roasted rather than steamed; potatoes brown, firm and crisp.
- Good heat distribution.
- Fully dishwasher-safe.
- Large capacity.
- Rubber foot pads for sure grip.

BAD POINTS

- The adjustable steam vent tightens when the lid gets hot, so isn't easy to adjust.

What about the rest?

- The **SUNBEAM FP4500** scored lowest for cooking, and food tends to stick to its aluminium surface.
- The **RONSON** is excellent at cooking, but not so good for ease of use and surface durability — the surface is the least durable of the non-stick models tested.
- The **KAMBROOK** is good for cooking, but one of the hardest to clean.
- The **MISTRAL MEF44** was one of the harder models to use, particularly the controls and cleaning.
- The **TEFAL** has separate components that can be differently combined for use as a grill, steamer or casserole cooker, but its cooking performance score was one of the lowest. The temperature controls and instructions aren't easy to use. It doesn't have a removable power cord or a steam vent, and the handles on the lid can get hot enough to burn you. It's also the least energy-efficient in the test.

Brand / model (in rank order)	PERFORMANCE 1 Overall score (%)	2 Cooking performance score (%)	3 Energy efficiency score (%)	4 Surface durability score (%)	5 Ease of use score (%)	6 FEATURES Non-stick coating	Detachable base	Dishwasher-safe	Detachable power cord	Steam vent	Tilt jug
SUNBEAM Ellise Stainless FP8600	80	85	68	100	62			✓	✓	✓ **(D)**	
BREVILLE TF150	75	70	63	100	69	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
MISTRAL MEF41	75	80	70	100	51	✓		✓	✓	✓	
SUNBEAM Ellise Essential FP7600	73	80	67	80	59	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
SUNBEAM Classic FP4500	71	60	70	100	64		✓	✓ **(B)**	✓	✓	
RONSON 9040	69	90	66	55	50	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
KAMBROOK KEF001	68	80	65	70	51	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
MISTRAL MEF44	68	75	69	80	49	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
TEFAL Astucio 7854	62	65	48	80	53	✓	✓ **(A)**	✓ **(C)**			

CONSUMER NZ

The Breville has large, clearly marked controls.

CONSUMER NZ

The Ronson's non-stick surface showed signs of bare metal halfway through our (fairly rigorous) scratch test, so you'd need to treat it gently.

What to look for

See the table for which models have some of the features listed here.

- **Size:** Few models declare their capacity — see the table to find the volume of those we tested. Also check that a frypan's dimensions will fit into your available storage space. There are lots of frypans on the market, so it should be easy to find the size you want.
- **Safety/cool-touch:** When the frypan is set to maximum heat, the temperature of the handles and lid knobs shouldn't exceed 68°C. The lid handles of the **TEFAL** reached 82°C in our tests, so you'd need to use oven mitts to handle them. All the rest stayed satisfactorily cool. Whether they claimed to be 'cool-touch' or not, all the frypans' handles stayed cool enough to touch, but it's still a claim worth looking for when you're shopping around.
- **Temperature controls:** Make sure these are clearly marked and easy to turn. Control knobs either give settings (often 1–10) or temperatures. If there are only settings, the instruction book should tell you which temperatures they correspond to — the **TEFAL** is the only tested model to include a temperature reference point for its settings on one of the handles.
- **Surface material:** Aluminium causes food to stick a bit. Stainless steel also lets food stick a little, but lasts very well. See *Surface durability*, far right, for how well the non-stick surfaces lasted in a test.
- **Dishwasher-safe** parts are very convenient, and all the tested models have at least some — see the table for details.
- **Detachable base:** This means you can remove the base (legs) to save a lot of space in the dishwasher, sink or cupboard, making the frypan less awkward to clean and store.
- All models except the **TEFAL** have a **detachable power cord**, and can be fully immersed in water with it removed.
- **Steam vents:** An adjustable steam vent gives greater flexibility

SPECIFICATIONS

Base shape	Frypan material	Measured dimensions (L x W x D; cm)*	Weight (kg)	Capacity (L)	Origin	Warranty (years)	Manufacturer / distributor	Price ($)**
Round	Stainless steel	41 x 31 x 22	3.5	5.8	Korea	1 **(E)**	Sunbeam	190
Round	Aluminium	41 x 33 x 21	3.8	4.6	Indonesia	1	Breville	150
Square	Aluminium	40 x 32 x 21	2.0	3.5	Australia	2	Mistral	70
Round	Aluminium	39 x 31 x 23	3.1	5.5	Australia	1	Sunbeam	145
Square	Aluminium	40 x 30 x 23	2.2	3.3	Australia	1	Sunbeam	90
Square	Aluminium	40 x 31 x 23	2.8	3.8	China	1	Housewares	129
Square	Aluminium	40 x 31 x 25	2.8	5.2	China	1	Kambrook	80
Square	Aluminium	40 x 31 x 23	2.3	5.2	Australia	2	Mistral	90
Rectangular	Steel	44 x 29 x 21	5.1	3.8	France	1	Groupe SEB	160

* *Measured dimensions include handles, lid knobs and any protrusions, rounded up to the next centimetre.*

** *Prices are recommended or average retail, as provided by manufacturers in June 2001.*

(A) *The base is separate from the cooking components.*

(B) *The pan and base are dishwasher-safe.*

(C) *All parts are dishwasher-safe except for the base.*

(D) *Steam vent isn't adjustable.*

(E) *The stainless steel cooking surface has a 25-year warranty against defective materials or manufacture.*

in cooking (you can open the vent to crisp up a chicken skin, for example). Without a vent the frypan will act like a steamer, and while steam may still escape from the sides, you won't be able to control it.

- **Tilt leg:** Allows fats and juices to be drained to one side of the frypan during cooking.
- **Tilt lid:** Allows access to the food while cooking without removing the lid completely.
- A **drip tray** can help protect the bench under the pan from spills — the **TEFAL** has one.
- **Rubber foot pads:** These provide a sure grip on the countertop — the **SUNBEAM FP8600** and **FP7600** and the **KAMBROOK** have them.

The Tefal's handles get hot enough to burn you; all the other models' stayed quite cool.

1 Overall score

The overall score is a combination of cooking performance, energy efficiency, surface durability and ease of use, weighted as follows:

- Cooking performance: 40%
- Energy efficiency: 15%
- Surface durability: 20%
- Ease of use: 25%

2 Cooking performance score

We assessed each pan for evenness of heat distribution by cooking a pancake in it, and also roasted a chicken and some potatoes and assessed them for texture, crispness of skin, etc.

3 Energy efficiency score

We assessed energy efficiency by comparing the power required to boil a litre of water.

4 Surface durability score

Seven of the nine frypans have a non-stick coating. We tested the surface durability of these models by scrubbing them with a Scotch Brite heavy-duty scourer up to 2000 times each. This is a very stringent test and many manufacturers advise against using scourers in real life, but it lets you know which models need the most careful handling or are likely to have a long-lasting non-stick surface in real life.

The **BREVILLE** and **MISTRAL MEF41** showed no signs of bare metal after our test. The **RONSON** was the least durable, with bare metal exposed after 1000 cycles. The coating of the **KAMBROOK** wore away after 1400 cycles; the **TEFAL**, **SUNBEAM FP7600** and **MISTRAL MEF44** after 1600 cycles.

The two models without a non-stick coating are made of very durable materials and were rated at 100% for this criterion.

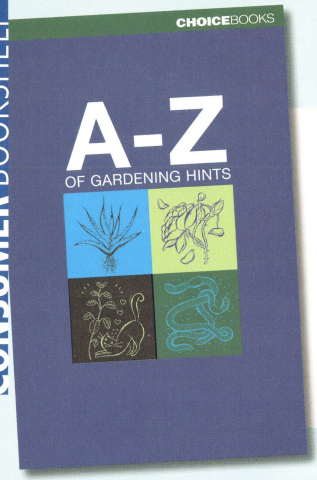
5 Ease of use score

We assessed the frypans for reading and operating the temperature controls, cleaning them, and the quality of their instructions, weighted as follows:

- Temperature controls: 40%
- Cleaning: 50%
- Instructions: 10%

6 Features

For an explanation of these see *What to look for*, left.



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A–Z OF GARDENING HINTS

Deborah Bibby and Lisa James

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It's no secret: with basic hints such as these, anyone can turn a patch of dirt into a garden!

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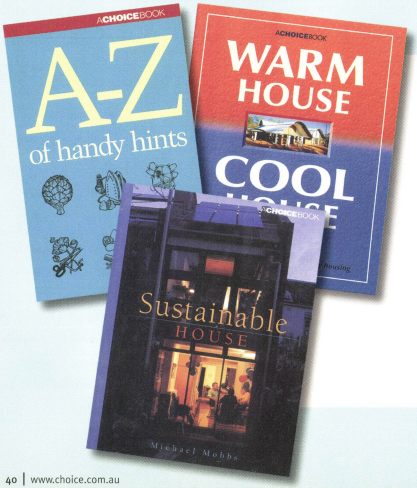

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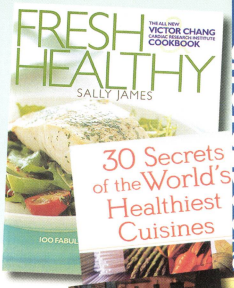

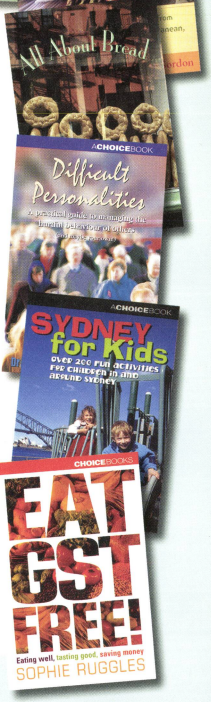

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Sally James

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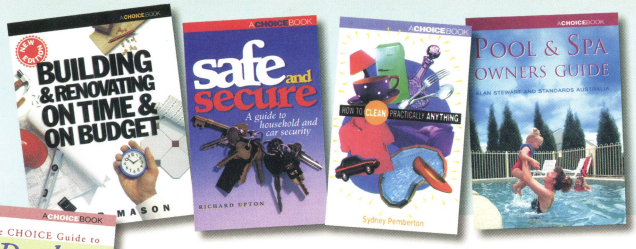

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PHOTOS: RHONDA TWANTE

Cheap little SUCKERS

You won't break the bank getting a clean carpet with one of these vacuum cleaners.

IN A NUTSHELL

- **Vacuum cleaners** *with reasonable dirt removal can also be cheap. Two of the top eight models are the* **KAMBROOK Jaguar Kompact KVC11** *at $98 and the* **SANYO SC-35A** *at $99.*
- **Uprights** *still generally remove more dirt, but it's no longer a cert: it depends on the design. Two uprights tested scored less than 50% for dirt removal.*
- **The top two uprights** *may clean well but they aren't perfect — one's noisy and the other's a bit tricky to manoeuvre, so read the profiles carefully before choosing one* *(page 44).*

This test covers 20 barrel and four upright vacuum cleaners priced up to $220, and the results show you can get a good job done for relatively little money. They're also reasonably easy to use: the average score for usage in this test isn't much different from that of more expensive models we've tested previously.

You probably have personal reasons for choosing an upright or a barrel type (stairs, low furniture, or just past experience), though the two uprights at the top of our table did get the best scores for dirt removal. Check the eight top performers profiled (page 44) for features like onboard storage and accessories.

One of the models in the test isn't recommended — the **HITACHI CV-2500A**. There's a gap between the air filter and the housing that allows some dirt past the filter and into the motor. A second sample we tested had the same problem, which might reduce the life of the motor.

The top scorer, the **HOOVER Breeze**, is noticeably the noisiest model — comparable to the sound of reasonably heavy traffic — but you couldn't have a normal conversation while using any of them.

WHAT TO BUY

Upright:	
HOOVER Breeze U4266-906	$199
AIRFLO 2100	$219
Barrel:	
PANASONIC MC-4860	$199
VOLTA Rolfy U1015	$169
PHILIPS Impact HR 8356	$159
SANYO SC-35A	$99
AIRFLO HSP AFV4800	$185
KAMBROOK Jaguar Kompact KVC11	$98

PROFILES

Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in April 2001. Anything lower is a bargain. Profiles a
See the table on page 46 for scores and features.

HOOVER BREEZE U4266-906

Price: $199
Type: Upright

GOOD POINTS

- Best in the test for dirt removal, and it cleans carpet edges well with the sides of the cleaning head.
- Adjustable head height for different floor surfaces and carpet heights.
- Has a long cord.

BAD POINTS

- Noisiest in the test.
- Not particularly easy to use: the cleaning head is a bit tricky to move over carpet, it's too high to reach under low furniture easily and it doesn't clean carpet edges well at the front; the throwaway paper dust collector is a bit difficult to replace; and the hand-operated on/off switch is fiddly to find (on the side of the cleaner).

AIRFLO 2100

Price: $219
Type: Upright

GOOD POINTS

- Second best for dirt removal.
- Has a telescopic wand that's adjustable for length.
- The cleaning head is easy to move over carpet.
- On/off hand switch is easy to operate.

BAD POINTS

- Not particularly easy to use: the cleaning head is too high to reach under low furniture easily and it doesn't clean carpet edges well at the front or left-hand side; the throwaway dust collector is fiddly to replace.

PANASONIC MC-4860

Price: $199
Type: Barrel

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to use under low furniture; the throwaway dust collector is easy to replace; the on/off switch is easy to operate with a foot; and the cord's long and retracts.

BAD POINTS

- The cleaning head doesn't clean carpet edges well at the front.

VOLTA ROLFY U1015

Price: $169
Type: Barrel

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to use under low furniture; the throwaway dust collector is easy to replace; there's a good on/off switch; and the cord's long and retracts.

BAD POINTS

- No dusting brush.
- The cleaning head is a little difficult to move over carpet and it doesn't clean carpet edges well at the front.

PHILIPS IMPACT HR 8356

Price: $159
Type: Barrel

GOOD POINTS

- Easy to use under low furniture, and a good on/off switch that's easy to operate with the foot.
- Cord retracts.

BAD POINTS

- No upholstery tool.
- The cleaning head doesn't clean carpet edges well at the front.

SANYO SC-35A

Price: $99
Type: Barrel

GOOD POINTS

- The cleaning head is easy to move over carpet.
- Cord retracts.

BAD POINTS

- No onboard accessory storage.
- No upholstery tool.
- It doesn't clean carpet edges well at the front of the cleaning head.
- The wand may not be long enough for some, and there's no storage for it.
- You need to bend down to use the on/off switch.

AIRFLO HSP AFV4800

Price: $185
Type: Barrel

GOOD POINTS

- Quite easy to use: the cleaning head is easy to move over carpet; the telescopic wand is adjustable for length; there's a good on/off switch that's easy to operate with a foot; and the cord retracts.

BAD POINTS

- It doesn't clean carpet edges well at the front of the cleaning head.
- The cloth dirt receptacle is very messy to empty.

For more information on vacuum cleaners — including profiles of all the models we tested — check out our comprehensive article at www.choice.com.au. Just type 'cheap little suckers' in the search box on the home page, and then click on 'vacuum cleaners'.

order, top to bottom, left to right.

KAMBROOK JAGUAR KOMPACT KVC11

Price: $98
Type: Barrel

GOOD POINTS

- Quite easy to use: the cleaning head is easy to move over carpet; the throwaway paper bag is easy to replace; there's a good on/off switch that's easy to operate with a foot; and the cord retracts.
- Carry strap.

BAD POINTS

- No upholstery tool.
- It doesn't clean carpet edges well at the front of the cleaning head.

What about the rest?

UPRIGHTS

- Both the **SANYO SC-A5A** and the **REMINGTON CompacVac UV250** scored less than 50% for dirt removal.

BARRELS

- Most of the other models that aren't profiled are only slightly worse for dirt removal or ease of use than those in the *What to buy* list, so they're worth considering if you find them at a good price. The **TIFFANY VC-101**, however, scored less than 50% for dirt removal.
- We don't recommend buying the **HITACHI CV-2500A** — there's a gap between the air filter and the housing that allows some dirt past the filter into the motor, which might reduce its life.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Try out models (switched on) in the shop: make sure they're comfortable to use and not too heavy, and that the head glides easily over both hard and carpeted surfaces. Listen to how much noise they make and check that the cord's long enough for your needs. Plus think about your storage space — uprights need more (and taller).

Most vacs have some of the following useful **features**; see the table for which models have them, if it's not noted here.

- **Accessories:** Check if tools such as a **crevice nozzle** (for narrow corners and around chair cushions), an **upholstery tool** (for curtains and soft furnishings) and a **dusting brush** come with the vac (or can be bought as extras), and check the **onboard storage** arrangement for accessories (only the **SANYO SC-35A** and the **HITACHI CV-2500A** in this test don't have onboard storage).
- **Adjustable head height:** You can usually adjust the height of the bristles on upright models, which is useful if you have different surfaces like wooden or tiled floors and carpet, or different carpet heights — in this test only the **HOOVER Breeze** has it.
- Decide what kind of **dust collector** you want — cloth ones are messier to clean than throwaway paper bags, though there's less ongoing cost (to you and the environment); the **AIRFLO HSP AFV4800** is the only model in the *What to buy* list with a cloth bag (see the table for the rest). If the cleaner has disposable dustbags, find out where you can buy them and how much they cost.
- All models on test except the **HOOVER Breeze, AIRFLO 2100, PANASONIC MC-3310, REMINGTON CompacVac** and **VOLTA Rolfy** have a dustbag-full indicator, so you don't need to open the machine to see if it needs emptying.
- **Variable suction:** A **bleed valve** allows you to lower the suction level; a **variable power** feature does the same thing.
- **Blower:** This can be useful for, say, blowing up an airbed — see the table for the models that have this feature.
- **Filter:** No models in this test claimed a specific anti-allergy function — all have standard filters, which need cleaning or replacing from time to time.
- Barrel models have a **retractable cord**; uprights don't, but you can wind their cord around two hooks to keep it tidy.
- **Telescopic wand:** You don't want to have to bend at an awkward angle, so an adjustable wand is useful — in this test, both **AIRFLO** models, the **VOLTA Rolfy**, the **HOOVER Patriot** and both **RONSON Imprezas** have one; otherwise make sure the length suits you.
- Most barrel models have wand storage, where the wand can be attached to the cleaner, which is useful for storing all the bits together. In this test the **SANYO SC-35A, TIFFANY** and **HITACHI CV-2500A** don't have it.

Upholstery tool

Crevice tool

Dusting brush

	PERFORMANCE				5 FEATURES					
Brand / model	1 Overall score (%)	2 Dirt removal score (%)	3 Ease of use score (%)	4 Noise (dB)	Crevice tool	Upholstery tool	Dusting brush	Onboard storage	Dust collector	Dustbag-indicato
HOOVER Breeze U4266-906 **(U)**	75	79	64	83	✓	✓	✓	✓	Paper bag	
AIRFLO 2100 **(U)**	73	77	64	71	✓	✓	✓	✓	Paper bag	
PANASONIC MC-4860	67	62	77	67	✓	✓	✓	✓	Paper bag	✓
VOLTA Rolfy U1015	66	63	73	69	✓	✓		✓	Paper bag	
PHILIPS Impact HR 8356	65	64	66	70	✓		✓	✓	Paper bag	✓
SANYO SC-35A	65	66	61	72	✓		✓		Paper bag	✓
AIRFLO HSP AFV4800	64	61	70	68	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cloth bag	✓
KAMBROOK Jaguar Kompact KVC11	64	59	74	69	✓		✓	✓	Paper bag	✓
HITACHI CV-2800B	63	66	56	67	✓		✓	✓	Plastic bin	✓
HOOVER Patriot H9001	63	56	80	73	✓	✓	✓	✓	Paper bag	✓
MOULINEX Power Star CN3	63	64	61	70		✓	✓	✓	Cloth bag	✓
MISTRAL BVC100	63	60	70	71	✓		✓	✓	Paper bag	✓
RONSON Impreza 8220	63	60	69	74	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cloth or paper bag	✓
DUSTFLO 2000	62	59	70	72	✓		✓	✓	Paper bag	✓
PANASONIC MC-3310	61	59	66	71	✓			✓	Paper bag	
LG V-3310	60	58	63	70	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cloth bag	✓
RONSON Impreza 8213	59	57	64	72	✓	✓	✓	✓	Cloth bag	✓
SANYO SC-76A	58	56	64	72	✓		✓	✓	Cloth bag	✓
JNL Digi-Wave 1350	56	53	63	72	✓		✓	✓	Cloth bag	✓
LG V-2600E	55	56	54	72	✓	✓	✓	✓ **(A)**	Cloth or paper bag	✓
SANYO SC-A5A **(U)**	55	49	70	73	✓	✓	✓	✓	Paper bag	
TIFFANY VC-101	51	47	60	71	✓		✓	✓	Cloth bag	✓
REMINGTON CompacVac UV250 **(U)**	43	38	53	72	✓			✓	Plastic bin	
NOT RECOMMENDED										
HITACHI CV-2500A	52	53	50	65	✓		✓		Plastic bin	✓

FOR PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

We assessed the vacuum cleaners for their suitability for people with a physical disability, using guidelines provided by the Independent Living Centre.

Although none was ideal, the **KAMBROOK** and both **PANASONICs** are better than the rest. They have good reach, a carry handle, an on/off switch that's easy to operate with a foot, and easy-to-replace paper dust collectors. The **KAMBROOK's** the lightest of the three, and its control markings are the easiest to read. All three removed about the same amount of dirt.

For people with asthma

Asthma NSW says the greatest risk for asthma that's associated with being indoors is dust mites. Vacuuming only removes a small percentage of dust in carpets, so it's important to do it regularly to prevent a build-up. Asthma NSW recommends the following:

- A vacuum cleaner that does well in dirt removal tests.
- The best option is a vac with a good filtration system (HEPA, HEPA S-Class or replaceable electrostatic) and double-walled vacuum bags to remove and retain the airborne allergens in the exhaust air.
- When vacuuming, keep the windows open, wear a mask, or get someone else to do it.
- You may even want to consider a built-in ducted vacuum system, which removes the suctioned dust to a separate storage bag.
- For further information about asthma, contact your local Asthma Foundation by calling 1800 645 130, or visit the Asthma NSW website on www.asthmansw.org.au.

SPECIFICATIONS								
ariable uction leed valve)	Variable power	Blower	6 Power (at maximum speed; W)	Reach (m)	Weight (kg)	Warranty (years)	Origin	Manufacturer / distributor	Target price ($) *
			610	10.4	6.1	2	US	Hoover	199 **(E)**
			900	7.4	7.2	2	Taiwan	Airflo	219
	✓	✓	1410	8.4	7.3	2 **(B)**	Malaysia	Matsushita	199
			1290	8.6	5.7	2	Hungary	Volta	169
			1340	8.0	5.9	2	China	Philips	159
			1040	8.2	4.3	2	China	Sanyo	99
	✓		1330	7.6	7.2	2	China	Airflo	185
			1150	7.6	5.0	1	China	Kambrook	98
		✓	1320	8.4	5.7	2 **(C)**	Singapore	Hitachi	189 **(E)**
	✓		1180	7.6	7.6	1	China	Hoover	199
		✓	1190	8.0	5.3	1	France	Moulinex	182
			1040	8.6	6.6	2	China	Mistral	129
	✓		1370	8.0	7.9	1	China	Ronson	179
			1080	7.8	5.6	1	China	Electrical Home-Aids	79
			1240	7.8	4.6	2	Malaysia	Matsushita Electric	130
			1150	7.8	5.1	2 **(C)**	Korea	LG	119
	✓		1300	8.0	8.0	2 **(C)**	China	Ronson	170
		✓	1440	8.4	6.7	2 / 1 **(D)**	China	Sanyo	185
	✓		1250	7.2	6.4	1	China	JNL Electronics	98
			1210	7.8	4.9	2	China	LG Electronics	99
			1030	6.0	7.2	2 / 1 **(D)**	Mexico	Sanyo	148
	✓	✓	1210	7.2	5.7	1	China	GAF Control	102
			280	6.6	3.5	2	China	Remington	99
			1220	8.2	5.4	2	Singapore	Hitachi	139

* *Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in April 2001.*

U *Upright.*

(A) *Onboard storage for crevice tool only.*

(B) *Parts and labour.*

(C) *Material and workmanship.*

(D) *Two years manufacture and parts; one year tools and labour.*

(E) *Recommended retail price.*

1 Overall score

We calculated the overall score by weighting dirt removal and ease of use as follows:

- Dirt removal: 70%.
- Ease of use: 30%.

2 Dirt removal score

We embedded 100 g of sand into a section of carpet and vacuumed it to a set pattern and speed. The dirt collected was then weighed and recorded as a percentage of the dirt applied. After doing this twice for each model, we averaged the results.

3 Ease of use score

This was based on how easy the body of the cleaner is to manoeuvre and how easy it is to move the cleaning head over carpet and under low furniture; how close it can get to edges and corners; how difficult it is to empty and change the dust collector; and how easy the various accessories are to use. We also considered use on stairs, onboard accessory storage, a blower function and controls.

4 Noise

We measured noise at the user's position and, while you couldn't have a normal conversation while any of them is on, the **HOOVER Breeze** is the noisiest — close to the sound of reasonably heavy traffic.

5 Features

For an explanation of these, see *What to look for*, page 45.

6 Power

We measured the power at maximum speed to see if a higher wattage guarantees better dirt removal: it doesn't.

The Hoover Breeze — effective but very noisy.

DR DUST SAYS...

John Roberts, a US environmental engineer in Seattle, is known as Dr Dust for his obsession with vacuuming.

"The carpet is the largest reservoir of dust in a house," he told the May 5, 2001, edition of New Scientist, *saying a typical household sample may contain a range of potentially toxic substances.*

While his research is specific to the US, he recommends you vacuum compulsively, use a power head, put doormats at entrances and, even better, don't wear shoes in the house. Fortunately, his is just one opinion ...

RECALLS & BANS

If you find a recall or ban not on our list, please let us know. Companies often rent 1800 numbers for a couple of months after the recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

THE PRODUCT: Land Rover Australia has recalled **Range Rover** and **Land Rover Discovery Series II V8 vehicles**, built from June 1998 to December 2000, with the following VIN ranges:

From:	To:
XA410482	1A452817
XA220000	1A299999
1A700000	1A713517

The problem: Under certain conditions water may travel up the breather pipe and into the gearbox, possibly causing corrosion of the park lock mechanism. If the park lock is used without applying the handbrake and it doesn't engage, the vehicle may roll away.
What to do: Don't use the gearbox park lock function on its own when parked — use the handbrake at all times. Contact any authorised Land Rover dealer if you've not yet responded to their mailout, to organise free modification of the vehicle. For further information call the Land Rover Australia Customer Response Centre on 1800 625 642.

THE PRODUCT: Subaru Australia has recalled **Outback** and **Liberty vehicles**, with model years from 1999 to 2001.
The problem: Due to a manufacturing fault (a breather line may have been left capped), there's a possibility of the fuel tank cracking and leaking when full.
What to do: Contact your local authorised Subaru dealer to have the breather line checked, and the fuel tank replaced if the breather line's blocked. For further information call Subaru Customer Care on 1800 226 643.

THE PRODUCT: Monza Imports has recalled **Fox Flite (off-road) motorcycle helmets** produced from June 2000 to April 2001 (inclusive). The affected helmets' date markings fall into the following range: 2000/06/01 to 2001/04/30 (year/month/day), which can be found on a production sticker (white with black border) on the polystyrene helmet lining, under the removable cloth lining.
The problem: The helmets may not comply with the Australian standard — they may not pass the penetration test.
What to do: Return the helmet to the place of purchase or nearest Fox stockist for a replacement.

THE PRODUCT: Ford Motor Company of Australia has recalled **certain UQ (1999)** and **US (2000) Explorer vehicles equipped with 4.0 L SOHC engines**, built from the start of production until March 31, 2000 (inclusive).
The problem: The powertrain control module (PCM) may allow the vehicle to exceed an appropriate top speed, which may cause it to exceed the speed rating of the tyres.
What to do: Contact your local authorised Ford dealer for repairs to be made free of charge.

THE PRODUCT: Kmart Australia has recalled, **from its Victorian stores**, the **Blue Box Tiny Dreams 'Carry Along' mini doll house range**, including a **mini doll house** (18 pieces), **summer house** (17 pieces) and **pet shop** (17 pieces).
The problem: The sticker on the front of the packaging incorrectly defines the product as suitable 'For ages 4 months'.
What to do: Return the products to your nearest Kmart store for a refund. For further information phone Kmart Customer Service on 1800 634 251.

THE PRODUCT: ECP Australia has recalled **Electra model WMN30RC** and **Emailair model WS088H indoor split air conditioning units**, sold from August 1998 to May 12, 2001. The affected units have serial numbers lower than 2411090692, are 1.4 m (57") long, and have three separate hinged panels across their width for accessing and cleaning the filters; the remote control is black. The model and serial numbers are on top of the unit, with the serial number shown as S/N and repeated under the barcode. (If the unit's fitted close to the ceiling a mirror may help with reading the number.)
The problem: There's a slight risk of failure in the terminal block connector, which may cause overheating and damage to the unit.
What to do: Don't leave the affected units on unattended. Call 1800 880 566, Monday to Friday, 8.30 am–5.30 pm (EST), to organise a service technician to check and, if necessary, replace the terminal block connector free of charge. Have your model and serial number with you when you call, or be able to confirm the minimum length of the unit.

THE PRODUCT: Cassons has recalled **Oneal brand SL-810** and **SL-710 senior and junior motorcycle helmets** manufactured before April 30, 2001.
The problem: Due to a possible manufacturing defect the helmets don't comply with the Australian standard — they didn't pass the penetration test.
What to do: Return it to the place of purchase for a replacement, or for further information call Cassons on (02) 9684 1210.

THE PRODUCT: Suzuki Australia has recalled **Suzuki (off-road) model JR50K1 minibikes** — model year 2001.
The problem: Due to a manufacturing defect there's a potential loss of throttle control, which could cause loss of control of the motorbike.
What to do: Don't ride the bike. Return it to the nearest authorised Suzuki dealer for free repair.

THE PRODUCT:

- **Super Cheap Auto** outlets in Queensland, NSW, the ACT and NT have recalled the **black plastic side handles on Super Works 115 mm angle grinders**, product code SWG600, sold since August 2000.
- **Marlow's Auto Parts & Accessories** stores in WA and Victoria, and **Rocca Bros Auto Parts & Accessories** stores in SA, have recalled **Foreman 115 mm angle grinders**, product code FG115, sold since August 2000.

The problem: The black plastic side handle on these products may, in certain circumstances, break and cause injury.
What to do: Don't use the angle grinders until the side handle has been replaced. Call 1800 047 788 (9 am–5 pm in all states and territories) to arrange for a replacement handle, or return it to the place of purchase for a replacement.

THE PRODUCT: Hunter Leisure has recalled **26" Huffy brand Gila mountain bikes (men's)** and **26" Huffy brand Kaibab (men's and women's) mountain bikes**, sold in Kmart stores from August 2000 to May 2001.
The problem: The bicycles may not comply with the Australian standard — the front wheel may detach from the fork.
What to do: Call Hunter Leisure on 1800 632 792 to find out how to get the bikes inspected and/or the necessary repairs done, or for further information. Or return them to Kmart for a refund.

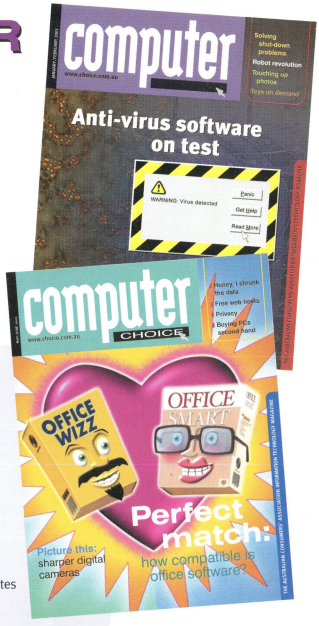
THE PRODUCT: Stihl has recalled **Stihl MS190T chainsaws**, with serial nos ranging from 49719331 to 49775979.
The problem: One important screw hasn't been fitted to the brake band area within the engine housing, which could lead to the chainsaw brake malfunctioning, risking injury to the operator in the event of a kickback.
What to do: Don't use the chainsaw. Return it immediately to your nearest Stihl specialist dealer so the missing screw can be fitted free of charge. Call 1300 366 665 to find your nearest dealer. For more information call Stihl's Technical Service Manager, Graeme Black, on 1800 337 927.

THE PRODUCT: Cathay Wholesale has recalled the following kinds of pills: **Chaun Xiong Cha Tiao San** (Aust L 42653); **Xiao Feng San** (Aust L 11725); and **Ba Zheng San** (Aust L 11655).
The problem: The pills contain aristolochic acids, a compound that's been linked to kidney damage and urinary tract cancer.
What to do: Don't take them. Return them to place of purchase for a refund.

THE PRODUCT: Daewoo Automotive Australia has recalled **Daewoo Nubira vehicles with 2.0 L engines**, built from the start of production till February 2001.
The problem: The outlet pipe from the fuel filter may bend and crack, and the fuel outlet hose from the filter to the injection rail may crack, possibly resulting in leaking fuel and risk of fire.
What to do: If you haven't already responded to notification, contact any Daewoo dealer to arrange for the filter and hose to be replaced free of charge.

Weekly updates of recalls and bans are posted on the CHOICE website at www.choice.com.au. You can also email us any recalls or bans not on this list at ausconsumer@choice.com.au.

WANT **COMPUTER INFORMATION WITHOUT** THE **HYPE**?



At last: a computer magazine that helps you sort through the jargon, hype and advertising claims in the constantly changing and often confusing world of computers.

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Your subscription will start with the July/August issue of *Computer* CHOICE, which covers web cameras, colour inkjet printers and voice recognition software, and tells you how to plan a database, build a website and use your computer to watch DVDs on your TV.

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- Building word processor templates
- File compression tips
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Qty

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Total .....

Delivery details

Mr/Ms/Mrs/Miss .....

Address .....

..... Postcode .....

Phone (daytime) ..... Subscriber no .....

Payment details **INS/0108**

◯ Enclosed is a cheque/money order for $.....
(payable to the Australian Consumers' Association)

◯ Please debit the selected credit card for $.....

◯ Bankcard ◯ Mastercard ◯ Visa

◯ Amex ◯ Diners Club Expiry date ...../.....

Card no.

Name of cardholder .....

Signature ..... Date ...../...../.....

Post this coupon to: **Australian Consumers' Association**, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or fax it to (02) 9577 3355.
ACN 000 281 925 ABN 35 799 246 568
This may be used as a tax invoice.

Our website has more information than even CHOICE itself — items that lend themselves better to the web medium than to print, for example, and some that are simply extra content to that published in the magazine.

If you're a current CHOICE subscriber you can get free trial access to the website. To register, just call us on (02) 9577 3399 and have your email address ready.

To whet your interest, here are some picks from the current information available on www.choice.com.au.

INSURANCE PREMIUM WATCH CAMPAIGN

One of the far-reaching consequences of the collapse of **HIH** is expected to be higher general insurance premiums. Have your home and contents or car insurance premiums gone up?

If they have, tell us about it in our 'premium watch' forum. To find it, just type 'premiums on the rise' in the search box, and click on the same words when you get there.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE HOME?

Go to the CHOICE Online home page, click on 'tools & shortcuts' at the top, then on 'what's new in products' to find tests and/or trials of a range of new-tech things to use at home. Most ad campaigns would have you believe their product is the best thing since sliced bread — now's your chance to find out what new stuff is really useful and what isn't so worthwhile. Some of the topics you can find there are:

4-in-1 Multi Sander

If you've got the odd home sanding job and around $165 to spare, the **BLACK & DECKER Variable Speed 4-in-1 Multisander** could be useful; click on '4-in-1 multisander' to find its good and bad points. Our lab technicians put it through its paces to see if it works well for finishing tasks, fast material removal, access to confined spaces, and moulding, as claimed by the manufacturer. They found it to be quite versatile and comfortable to use — good for an occasional handyperson, especially if you can get hold of the special sandpaper it takes at a good price.

Variable Power Tools 7

Powered handsaw

Does this really take the effort out of traditional handsawing? Get our testers' impressions on how the **BLACK & DECKER Scorpion** performed, plus information on its features, by clicking on 'Scorpion powered handsaw'. If you're interested in power tools, you could also check out our articles on impact drills and avoiding DIY injuries — just click on the sidebar links to find them.

Steam glass cleaner

Click on 'putting the steam into your squeegee' to read our test of the new $99 Electrolux steam glass cleaner. It's claimed to be ideal for glass and windows, to sanitise and clean with steam and to be useful for cleaning work surfaces, plastics, ceramics and small tiled and marble surfaces. Find out how it works, and how it compared with a $5 manual squeegee (a clue: save your money).

Window washers

Attach the container to your hose, spray the cleaning fluid onto your window, wait a while and rinse. They sound simple, but are the new window cleaners really this easy to use and, even if they are, do they work? On the whole, yes, especially for otherwise hard-to-reach windows, though our trialists didn't find them all that easy to use. Click on 'window washers' to read our trialists' comments and see if they're for you.

WEDDING BUDGET + FORUM

If you're planning the big day, our wedding budget is just the thing you need — type 'weddings on a budget' in the search box on the home page, click on the article, then on 'budget planner'. Use the table to fill in the details of suppliers, costs, payments and due dates — you'll get a good idea of what you want to spend and where you want to spend it, without going overboard and blowing your budget.

Our online wedding forum's also a useful resource for anyone involved in planning a wedding, or to share interesting tales of the event. Click on the 'forums' link at the bottom of page one of 'weddings on a budget' to go straight there. ■

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TEST RESEARCH (NATA-accredited) provides independent, fee-for-service testing and research on consumer products, services and regulatory issues for other consumer organisations, governments and industry; under some conditions it undertakes public testing. **Contact** Jeanette Dwyer on (02) 9577 3399.
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September 2000 — August 2001

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BECOME A FRIEND OF THE CONSUMERS' ASSOCIATION

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RICHARD THWAITE

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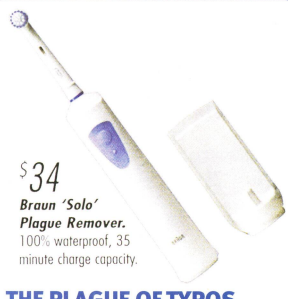
THE HARD WORD

THERE'S NO APHRODISIAC LIKE BUTTER CHICKEN?

pieces of chicken marinated overnight in spices & y
d and served in an erotically spiced tomato cream s



$34
Braun 'Solo' Plague Remover.
100% waterproof, 35 minute charge capacity.

THE PLAGUE OF TYPOS

We were inundated with letters about this rather unfortunate typo.

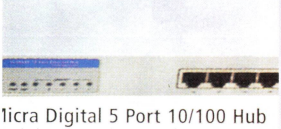
It's reassuring to know that we'll never again have to contend with the illness and death caused by the plague.

NO DICE, SUNSHINE

"Are we normally charged for the sun?" asks 11-year-old Andrew Lee. "And what do they mean 'getting the sun free' when they charge $329 to install a 'sun'?"

GARRON SKYLIGHTS

GET THE SUN FREE!
FROM ONLY $329
FULLY INSTALLED
CALL NOW AND SAVE



licra Digital 5 Port 10/100 Hub
Includes power adaptor • Lifetime warranty
✓3 year warranty available 251-9440

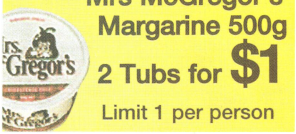
How long is a lifetime?

Apparently less than three years.

It's good to know the dead germs are nice and clean!

SHOP WITH A FRIEND ...

... because it's the only way you'll be able to take advantage of this special offer.



HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP?

The Hard Word would like to thank all the readers who've responded with examples of outrageous ads, promotions and products. Thanks to R Knight, A Lee, B Peick, B Thomson, M Thurley and L Watson for their contributions to this month's *Hard Word*. Please keep sending them in.

If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to *The Hard Word*, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, or email your suggestions to thehardword@choice.com.au.

A request from our art team: If you send us clippings, labels or packaging, please keep them as clean and neat as possible (and don't mark them with highlighters or pens or cut the corners off, etc) so we can reproduce them on this page. Thank you.

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